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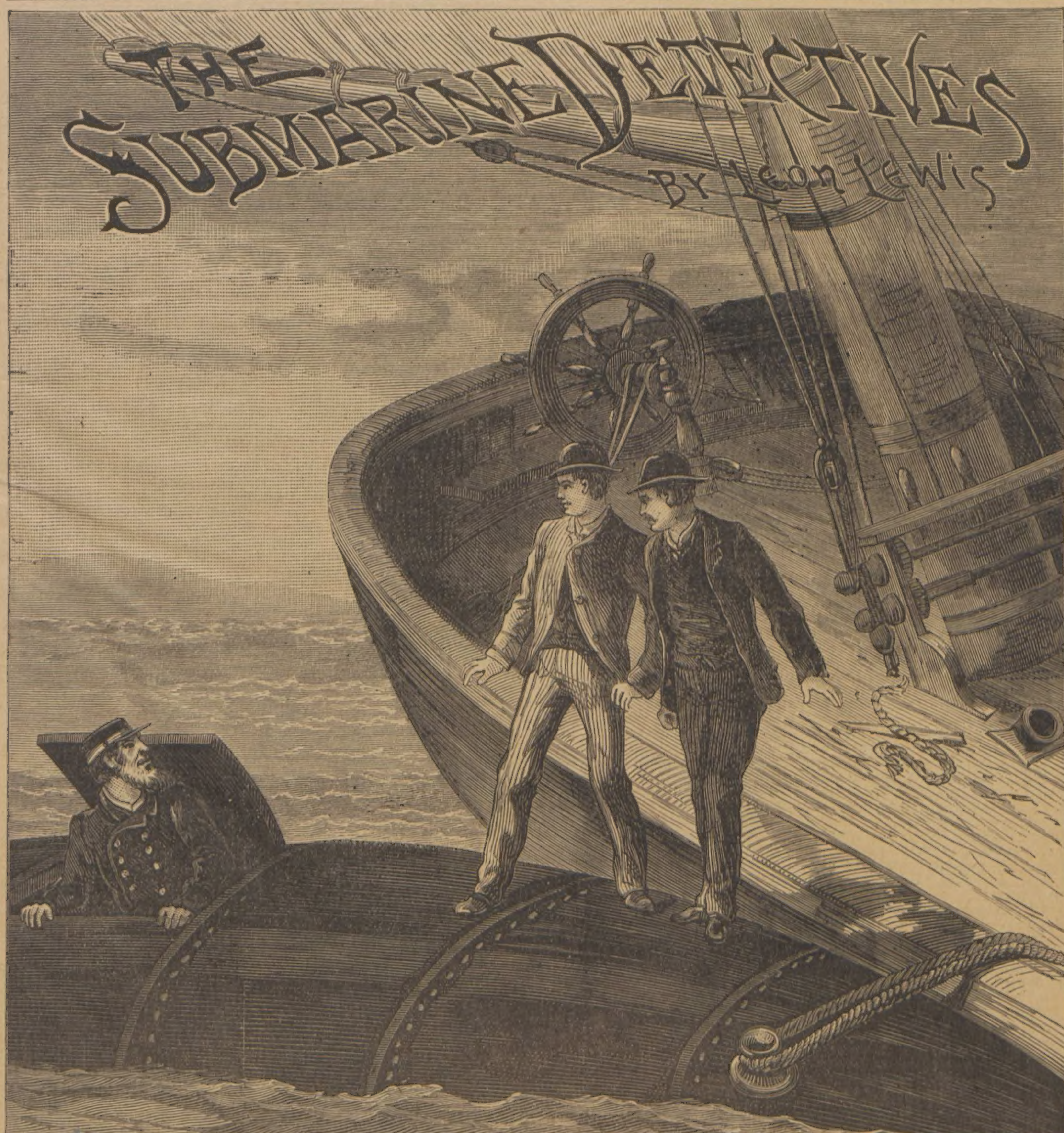
No. 624.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., October 8, 1890.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. XLVIII.



THE NEXT MOMENT THE HATCH WAS RAISED FROM WITHIN, AND CAPTAIN DRAKE MADE HIS APPEARANCE.

The Submarine Detectives ; OR, THE WATER GHOUL.

BY LEON LEWIS,
AUTHOR OF "WATER WOLF," "RED KNIFE,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. TO WHAT FATE?

A BEAUTIFUL day was drawing to a close. In the parlor of a fine residence in a favorite quarter of Baltimore, sat a very fair and lovely woman, whose age could not have exceeded forty years.

She was the wife of Mr. Hiram Weatherbee, a wealthy ship-owner and shipping merchant, who had long been one of the most prosperous and prominent business men of the city.

She was radiantly attired, and every object around her was eloquently indicative of a life of ease and luxury, as well as social distinction, but her attitude expressed the deepest gloom and dejection.

Despite all the gorgeous furnishings of her home, despite the glow of health upon her features, she had for many years been the prey of a haunting melancholy her most intimate friends had been unable to fathom.

As she sat there, in the gathering shadows, her lovely face became more and more clouded, and her features at length changed almost convulsively under the presence of her emotion.

"So, Clara Morse is a grandmother?" she murmured, as she bestowed her attention anew upon a letter from an old school friend she had been reading. "And her boys and girls are all growing up models of health and brightness and promise. No wonder she is happy. What sunlight and music there must always be in her home! What a prattle of voices! What merry laughter! Oh, it is hard to sit here alone, alone, and think of what might have been!"

She clasped her hand tightly to her head, as if its throbbings pained her, and emitted a sigh that came from the depths of her soul.

"Happy—yes, I suppose I ought to be so," she resumed, as if in response to some phrase in the letter, as she placed it upon a shelf near her. "With such a husband as Hiram Weatherbee, how could it be otherwise? With ample means, leisure for study and social intercourse, true and devoted friends—what more could heart desire? Yet how few persons there are in the world who ever feel the misery and desolation I endure at this moment!"

She bowed her head upon her fair hands, and her whole form quivered like the leaves of an aspen.

"But this is all wrong," she soon ejaculated, as she arose and began walking to and fro, with a resolute effort to master her emotions. "What would Clara say to me, if she could witness the effect of her letter? I doubt if I could even explain to her satisfactorily the wild unrest and yearning I so often experience. The cry of my soul is not for money and position, but for my lost darling! In what part of the bay did her sweet little form find its last resting-place? Whither was it carried by the winds and waves?"

She drew from her bosom the picture of a little girl, some two years of age, and fixed her gaze as fondly as feverishly upon it, coming to a halt near one of the front windows.

A moment later, she was startled from her reverie by footsteps at the entrance of the parlor.

"Ah, it's you, Hiram?" was her greeting, as she looked up to encounter the gaze of her husband. "You are home later than usual. You look troubled, too."

"I am in receipt of bad news, Myra," declared the merchant, returning her caresses, his handsome, noble face clouding still more. "The Alaska has gone the way of the Hester, Myra!"

"Lost, Hiram?"

"Destroyed! She was struck by a torpedo this morning somewhere off Yorktown, and her bow was torn open, with a loss of I know not how many lives. Here's the telegram from Captain Cotter."

The lady perused the communication with a startled and benumbed air.

"Here's an article upon the subject in the *Evening Times*," continued Mr. Weatherbee, as he seated himself and wiped his damp forehead, producing the journal mentioned. The editor, as you will see, takes the very foolish ground that the torpedo is one which has been drifting about in the bay ever since the war. I have just sent him a line to the effect that any such torpedoes would hardly be discriminating enough to destroy two of my ships in succession. These blows doubtless come, Myra, from a personal enemy."

"No doubt of it, Hiram. But who can he be?"

"I would give half my fortune to know," declared the merchant. "But I haven't even a suspicion. Once or twice I have asked myself

if he may not be our terrible enemy of other days, Abner Radwill."

"Even as I have more than once suggested that Abner Radwill may have abducted our lost Florrie, and that she was not drowned!"

"Don't, Myra!" pleaded the merchant, nervously. "Any fact to that effect would drive me mad! No, Myra! Our terrible enemy cannot be Abner Radwill. There can be no doubt that he broke through the ice and was drowned, after his escape from the penitentiary, all these years ago. His pursuers so reported. It would kill me to know that our poor Florrie is alive and in his hands! Better, a thousand times better, to think of her as dead! But, good-by for an hour, love," and the merchant arose briskly. "We'll have dinner later. I am going to telegraph Captain Cotter for further particulars, and take a number of measures looking to the unearthing of this secret enemy. To be sure, other ships than mine have been destroyed, but I seem to be an especial object of his malice."

He drew his wife to his heart a moment, with a tenderness which attested what protection they had in each other from all earthly trouble, and hurriedly took his departure.

"It is Abner Radwill who is doing this thing," murmured Mrs. Weatherbee, after her husband's departure. I feel that he lives—almost know it! He was a student of chemistry, and how easy to have drifted into the study of explosives! And that terrible haunting thought keeps coming back to me—that he may have stolen Florrie! that she may even now be at his mercy!"

Her musings were interrupted by a ring at the front door.

She had barely time to resume her seat when her maid entered her presence.

"A call, with a note, ma'am," was the announcement.

The lady mechanically broke the seal of the missive and read as follows:

"MADAM:—I am the bearer of the strangest of tidings. The grave has given up its dead! The mystery of your lost daughter's fate is a mystery no longer! From the pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Pocompsco. JOHN B. TURNER."

It was not till the lady read these lines twice, and glanced, with whitening face, at the inclosed card of the writer, that she was able to speak.

"The gentleman—is in the reception-room?" she faltered.

The maid assented.

"Remain here, Betty. I will go to him!" Gaining her feet promptly, Mrs. Weatherbee struggled a moment to regain her outward calmness, and then hastened to the visitor's presence.

Mr. Turner proved to be a tall, dark, somewhat singular-looking personage. He was clad in the traditional black broadcloth of his profession, and wore a white necktie of the largest size as prominently as possible. The mien with which he arose at the lady's entrance seemed to come considerably short of the ease and polish usually displayed by clergymen, but the fact was unnoticed in the excitement his message had communicated.

"You are Mrs. Weatherbee?" he queried, with a bow suggestive of repressed emotions.

The lady assented, motioning him to resume his seat, and took possession of a sofa facing him.

"I hardly know how to acquit myself of my strange errand," said the visitor, seating himself nervously, "and will plunge into the subject with as few preliminaries as possible."

He cleared his throat, and with a keen and comprehensive glance around, resumed:

"Long years ago, when you were living on the coast a score of miles north of us, and before your removal to Baltimore, you had a lovely daughter. During the absence of yourself and Mr. Weatherbee, one day, when the child was about two years old—you and your husband had visited this city, in fact, to buy this very house—your little girl strayed away from her nurse, opened a gate giving upon a lane leading to the bay, and in this way vanished from your sight and knowledge!"

As old as was the sad story, the mother was unable to repress a groan.

"Well, sir?" she faltered, regarding her visitor as if fascinated, while he continued:

"You have always supposed that your child reached the water and fell into it and was drowned, her body being carried away seaward by the tide. The first half only of this supposition is true. In a word, madam, your child was saved by a fisherman who chanced to be passing. She still lives. I have seen her within the last twenty-four hours. In proof of her continued existence—in proof of all I have told you—you need only glance at her picture. It has recently been taken, and here is a copy!"

The lady caught from his hand the photograph he extended, and a wild scream of recognition burst from her lips.

"Oh, it is—it is my Florrie!" she gasped, a burning flush of joy appearing on her cheeks. "I know not why your 'fisherman' kept her from us! We searched far and wide for the body—offered rewards—"

"I will explain that," said the clergyman, as Mrs. Weatherbee pressed the portrait to her lips rapturously. "His first thought was to get

a great reward. His second was a fear that he would be sent to prison as a kidnapper. While oscillating between these sentiments, he was suddenly taken ill and died. His widow—"

The lady interrupted him. She had hardly comprehended these explanations, so entirely was her soul occupied by her great gladness.

"Of all that later, Mr. Turner," she said, again raining kisses upon the photograph. "I know that my daughter lives! I know that this is a picture of my dear, lost daughter! You can see for yourself how much she resembles me! She is precisely what I have always thought she would have been! Where is she now?"

"I have brought her to town with me," was the answer. "She is at the Monument Hotel. I wished her to come with me in the carriage I have at the door, but she feared you might be absent, or that there might be some mistake in the story of her parentage—"

"A carriage at the door?"

It was the only phrase that fixed the lady's attention at that moment of supreme excitement! "Quick!" she cried. "Take me to her, Mr. Turner! A word to my maid, and I will follow you!"

Another minute, and Mrs. Weatherbee had entered the carriage with the bearer of these strange and exciting tidings, and was being driven rapidly away.

The carriage could hardly have left the residence of the Weatherbees out of sight behind, when Mr. Hiram Weatherbee, paling and flushing by turns, in the wildest excitement, came dashing up to his door in a carriage.

"Ah, there you are, Betty?" he called to the maid, as he leaped out upon the sidewalk. "Where is your mistress?"

Betty had been hovering about the door since the departure of Mrs. Weatherbee. The maid had even had serious misgivings. And these misgivings were more than strengthened by the aspect of her master. His coat was off, his collar and necktie awry, his shirt-sleeves torn, and his face bore several scratches and bruises.

"Why, what has happened, Mr. Weatherbee?" cried Betty, as the merchant ascended the steps of his dwelling two at a time.

"Happened?" panted the excited man. "Some unknown scoundrels have tried to abduct me—to carry me off bodily in a carriage they had in waiting! If the police had not appeared unexpectedly, the ruffians would have got away with me! But where is Mrs. Weatherbee?"

"She—she has gone away with some strange clergyman!" faltered the maid, finding vent in tears for her gathering terrors.

"Gone? Where?"

"She only said she was going to call at the Monument Hotel, and would be back in a few minutes!"

A moment Mr. Weatherbee clung to the railing of the steps, as motionless as if petrified; then he staggered back to the carriage in which he had come.

"Quick! To the Monument Hotel!" he ordered. "Drive for your life!"

It is needless to say that no trace of Mrs. Weatherbee was found that evening or later at the Monument Hotel.

Equally fruitless was the general alarm sent out from all the police stations as quickly as possible.

Equally in vain were the long and weary quests that succeeded during the next three months.

No clew whatever was gained to the secret of the lady's strange disappearance.

The only certainty was that Mrs. Weatherbee had gone beyond the ken of her mourning husband and friends.

But how and why? Under what circumstances? Whither? To what fate?

CHAPTER II.

ON TRACK OF A GREAT VILLAINY.

IN Chesapeake Bay, not far below the mouth of the Potomac and near the western shore, a small sail-boat was standing southward, with a light and unsteady breeze, some three months subsequent to the date of the occurrences recorded in the preceding pages.

This boat contained two young men, whose merry and careless mien did not so entirely conceal their grave preoccupations as they imagined.

They were named Ally Webber and Mark Sherman.

Although scarcely nineteen, they had sailed long voyages, and were generally known throughout the bay as pilots of rare skill and capacity.

They had also acquired distinction upon the harbor and river police of Baltimore.

"Well, here we are near the scene of our proposed operations," said Ally, as he noticed that the shadows of the approaching night were already descending around him. "We arrived at a good hour, notwithstanding the light and contrary winds which have delayed us."

"Yes, Ally. The situation could not be better," returned Mark. "We arrive unseen and

unexpected, which is the first condition of getting in good detective work. But what is that dark object straight ahead of us?"

"The wreck of the Alaska, no doubt."

The dark object soon loomed up sufficiently to the view of the navigators for them to make it out.

It was the hull of a large iron ship lying partly out of the water, broadside to the shore, and at no great distance from it.

On the side nearest the couple was a large and irregular hole, extending from the foremast to the cut-water, which had evidently been torn by an explosion of powder or dynamite.

"We'll lower the mast and sail," added Ally, in a guarded tone. "We'll finish with the oars."

The change was made as promptly as noiselessly, and the boat drew nearer the wreck.

"It's near low water," observed Mark.

"Yes, or we should not see so much of that hole," returned Ally. "Perhaps we can take the boat into the hold. The gap seems large enough."

"No doubt of it. The water flows in and out of the hold as regularly as the tides come."

The boat had nearly reached the wreck, when there arose a tremendous ebullition within the hold, as if the water therein had suddenly commenced to boil.

"What's that?" asked Ally, as he ordered his comrade by a startled gesture to cease rowing.

Ere Mark could reply, the ebullition in question was borne outside, passing through the rent in the side of the ship, and several immense sharks darted past the boat with such fury as to rock it violently.

"A fine family to go to keeping house with," exclaimed Mark, as the sharks rushed seaward, showing their dorsal fins. "It seems they have pre-empted the wreck already."

"Yes, at least this half of it. It will be wise to keep out of the hold and make fast under the inshore quarter. You may row in that direction."

The boat had scarcely reached the situation suggested, when the young detective noticed that quite a mass of hamper, including the mizzen shrouds, was hanging over the side at this point.

"See!" cried Mark. "We shall have no difficulty in making our way aboard."

"One moment," said Ally. "I'll light a bull's-eye."

A dark-lantern was lighted, and its beams were turned an instant upon the hamper referred to.

"Yes, we can climb up here," pursued Ally. "In fact, this hamper seems to have been arranged purposely to facilitate going aboard. We may find worse customers than the sharks in possession."

The boat having been duly secured, Ally Webber led the way to the deck with the grace and agility of a squirrel.

The wreck lay at a slight incline to the shore, with its keel and hull deeply grounded in a fine sand.

The stern was several feet higher than the bow, and the cabin had consequently remained out of water even at high tide.

Before reaching the foot of the companion-way the young detectives readily assured themselves that the cabin had no other human occupants than themselves.

It had, in fact, been stripped of its furniture—of everything movable—and presented such a picture as the couple had never before seen.

"Is this the work of the pirates?" asked Mark, as Ally flashed the rays of his bull's-eye upon their surroundings.

"No, it is the work of the owner," replied Ally. "Mr. Weatherbee has not yet decided what measures to take with the iron hull itself, other than to let us have it for our secret headquarters during the next few weeks. There was time to beach the ship, it seems, after the torpedo struck her. You would not think so to look at her now, but that hole in her side was chiefly opened by a gale that followed the damage. Until then, the plating, although torn and twisted, had hung together."

The couple looked around with the keenest interest, passing into several state-rooms one after another.

"We shall be comfortable here as long as we choose to stay," said Ally, as he hung his bull's-eye against the mizzen-mast, in such a way as to render its light invisible from the stern and the adjacent shore.

"Or until some rousing gale finishes the task of breaking up the hull," amended Mark, "or we have executed the weighty job we have undertaken. The next task in hand is to bring up the contents of our boat—all the necessary stores and effects, including our bedding—and take possession."

No time was lost in acting upon this suggestion, but it was at least an hour before the couple had installed themselves to their liking.

Ally then looked at his watch.

"It's not late," he muttered. "But I'm tired 's a dog, and we can't do better than to turn in. If all we have heard and seen is true, to say nothing of what we suspect, we shall soon

have ample use for all our strength and cleverness."

Mark assented, and within a few minutes after locking themselves up in the state-room they had selected, they were sleeping as soundly as calmly, each placing his especial reliance upon a revolver he had secreted under his pillow.

When Ally awoke in the morning, he found that Mark was preparing coffee, with the aid of a petroleum "cooker" they had brought with them.

After breakfast, the couple sauntered to the deck and bent a keen glance around.

Immediately before them was a long stretch of coast, with a light-house several miles to the northward, and a large stone building as many miles to the southward.

It was upon this dwelling that the glances of the young detectives lingered.

"There lives a man who has fallen under Mr. Weatherbee's suspicion," observed Ally, "and he must be one of the first objects of our investigations. As you see, Mark, his house is a veritable castle."

At various points of the coast, between the light-house and the dwelling, could be seen the cabins of fishermen, varied with an occasional farm-house, but the general aspect of the scene was one of silence and retirement, hardly a soul being visible.

Walking forward, the young detectives directed their gaze into the open hold, at the point where the deck and internal timbers of the ship had been completely broken away by an explosion.

The sharks they had seen the preceding night were now present again, and the hold nearly full of water, the tide not long since having been at its high.

The couple looked in curious wonder.

Two of the sharks were twelve or fifteen feet in length.

All of them seemed to be without fear, and to be even looking at the young detectives for something to eat, circling round and round in the hold, and half turning on their sides at every gesture of the new-comers.

"They seem to have been tamed," said Mark. "Can any one be in the habit of feeding them?"

"It's more likely that they have fed themselves," replied Ally. "Several sailors and passengers were blown overboard, you will remember, at the time of the explosion, and may have been devoured by these monsters, which thus became accustomed to human flesh and hence contrive to hang around the wreck for further supplies!"

Mark brought a piece of salt pork from the state-room the young detectives had converted into a larder, and threw it into the hold.

The meat had scarcely reached the water when it was caught in the wide mouth of one of the monsters, which turned sideways half out of the water with the quickness of a flash of lightning.

For a few moments the whole hold boiled with the excited movements to which this incident gave rise.

"A poor show for any one tumbling into that crowd!" muttered Ally. "Sit down, Mark," and the speaker set the example by planting himself upon one of the many empty boxes occupying the deck. "Let's comprehend the situation fully and agree upon our line of conduct. During the past two or three years, at least three ships have sailed from Baltimore which have never since been heard of. Another has been wrecked by a false light. The Hester was destroyed so suddenly by a torpedo that scarcely a man escaped. To crown all these mysteries, this iron ship, the stanch clipper Alaska has encountered a torpedo as she was making her way toward the ocean. Very curious, is it not, that at least three of these ships have met their fates within striking distance of this spot? Everything points to the theory that there is a gang of desperate and unscrupulous men somewhere on these shores who are committing these depredations. As Mr. Weatherbee has been the principal loser from these outrages, he begins to think that the guilty party must be some personal enemy—perhaps the unknown scoundrel who abducted Mrs. Weatherbee so boldly and mysteriously. Be that as it may, Mr. Weatherbee has charged us to come here and make an effort to unearth the offenders!"

"But are you sure we have come to the right quarter?" asked Mark.

"Yes, at least reasonably sure," declared Ally. "Everything seems to show that a body of men—nobody can yet say how few or how many—have planted themselves somewhere on this coast, and with the aid of the newest discoveries and inventions in the matter of torpedoes—and possibly in submarine boats—are engaged in wrecking hereabouts upon a large and original scale, either for revenge or money, or for both together."

"And even if these men are not exactly in this vicinity," said Mark, "we may as well begin our work here, since all things must have a beginning."

"Quite right," said Ally. "But all our information points to these coasts and waters as the seat of the piracy in question. I have even

some definite and well-founded suspicions of the owner and occupier of that handsome dwelling on the bluff in the distance."

"The place is at least occupied," observed Mark, as he raised to his eye a glass he had brought from the cabin. "There is a column of smoke rising from at least two different chimneys, and—yes, I see a horseman dashing swiftly along the shore in this direction!"

"Indeed, Mark!"

"Look for yourself!"

Ally Webber hastened to comply.

"That's so," he said. "The old fellow has been quick to see that his dominions have been invaded. He is evidently coming to see who and what we are."

The young detectives watched the horseman as he came nearer and nearer, now disappearing behind sundry irregularities of the coast, and now rising into view upon the crest of a bluff.

At last he vanished anew from the view of the watchers, and for a time nothing more was seen of him.

"He's not coming here after all," observed Ally. "He must have retraced his steps by some other route."

"No," cried Mark, with a start. "He has left his horse on the shore, and is coming to us in a boat. There he is, just coming around the point."

The announcement was quite correct, and in an instant the young detectives became the prey of the deepest curiosity and excitement.

"Perhaps he has not seen us," suggested Ally. "He may be coming here for some purpose of his own."

"That's so," returned Mark. "We have been very quiet, and he would have had to look very close to detect our presence."

Ally reflected a moment.

"Of course we are prepared for every emergency," he said, "but if we have not been seen, why should we show ourselves? If you'll slip into the cabin, Mark, locking yourself in, I'll receive this stranger alone, in case I conclude to show myself to him."

There was more in this suggestion than the words expressed, and Mark crept away on his hands and knees, keeping the bulwarks between him and the new-comer, and promptly vanished.

Ally Webber looked around sharply, with deep speculation in his glance.

As we have indicated, there were a number of large boxes and other empty receptacles scattered about the deck, and the young detective hastened to stow himself away in one of the snug retreats thus afforded him, taking care to place himself in such a position that he could scan the pool of sharks and all the forward part of the wreck.

The rower was advancing quite at his leisure, and the wait naturally seemed a long one to the impatient watcher, but at length he had the pleasure of seeing the unknown pull up under the port bow of the Alaska.

Throwing the end of his painter over the jibboom, the stranger readily climbed aboard at the heel of the bowsprit, the tide being still high enough to leave the bow of the wreck four-fifths under water.

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE MAKING HIS WAY.

NEVER in all his experience with criminals had Ally Webber seen a man who impressed him more disagreeably than did the new-comer.

He was at least six feet in height and of massive proportions, his chest being very wide, his shoulders broad and heavy, and his hands and limbs of the most formidable character.

His hair, like his beard, was long and coarse, and as black as night.

His eyes were strangely dark and piercing, and deeply sunken in their sockets, as if he were given to long and exhausting vigils.

His black, heavy eyebrows met over his bold, aquiline nose, and were as jagged and bushy as a thicket.

His mouth was wide and his jaws heavy, and the entire expression of his countenance at once sinister and brutal.

The garb of this man was fairly good and gentlemanly, although neither elegant nor fashionable.

There were valuable rings on the fingers of his left hand, and diamond studs gleamed from the bosom of his glossy shirt.

His hat was a high-crown felt and his massive feet were incased in patent-leather shoes.

No weapons of any kind were visible, but the aspect of the man was ample evidence that a revolver, at least, was not far distant.

The arrival of this man, as quiet as were his movements, threw the sharks in the hold into a state of intense excitement.

They circled round and round like lightning, at times leaping half out of the water, and appearing anxious to see the new-comer.

With a grim smile that made his coarse face still more repulsive, the unknown leaned over the bulwarks and drew up from the boat a couple of stout sacks which he conveyed to the edge of the opening in the deck.

The sharks at this proceeding became still more active and attentive.

"Can't yer wait a minute, my beauties?" demanded the new-comer, as he proceeded to open the sacks. "To judge by yer actions, one'd say yer only get what I feeds yer!"

The contents of the sacks were soon seen to be the carcass of a calf five or six weeks old, cut into a score of pieces.

"Here's yer breakfast," called the unknown, with his strange, jocose air, as he tossed a piece of veal into the hold. "Civil, now! There's enough fur all," and he tossed a second morsel. "Strange how rav'nous yer are! Never seem to have enough, not even when a whole crew—"

He checked himself abruptly, with a swift glance around, but continued to throw rapidly to the sharks the meat he had brought for them.

The whole hold was now like a seething caldron.

For every piece of veal there were three or four hungry claimants, and those which secured the least were naturally the most violent and furious in their movements.

It was no rare thing to see four or five of the ferocious monsters so inextricably mixed up in one group that a person unused to the scene would have been unable at first glance to define its real nature.

"There, it's all gone," resumed the unknown, as he paused, empty-handed, and surveyed the monsters, "and yer don't seem to have had a bite apiece! But yer won't get no more till to-morrow. Yer must nose about a little for yourselves! There's plenty o' dead men in the bay, if yer'll take the trouble to hunt 'em! Seems to me yer oughter be about *trained* now!—ready to eat any detectives who may show up here!"

Seating himself upon an empty box, the unknown bestowed upon his surroundings a keen glance, which seemed to satisfy his sense of uneasiness, and then he gave himself up to the consideration of some fixed idea by which he was haunted.

Gradually the sharks became quiet, as if they had realized that this strange feast was ended, and at length two or three of the smallest led the way out of the hold and disappeared seaward, as if to look for the prey at which the monologue of the new-comer had hinted.

Becoming more and more absorbed in his musings, the unknown drew a letter from his pocket and read it with an air of the keenest interest.

"Good for her!" he muttered. "She's still a close prisoner where I can find her!"

A second letter received the same attention as the first, and he then ejaculated jeeringly:

"Good for him, too! He's not likely to disturb me!"

The interest with which Ally Webber had watched these proceedings will be readily imagined.

His mind instinctively began filling with suspicions of the gravest character—with a disgust akin to horror.

Who and what was this man?

Thus far the new-comer had not seen the hidden spy, or the boat under the stern, and it was evident from his manner that he had no suspicion of the presence of the young detectives.

It seemed quite possible that the unknown would retire as ignorant as he had come.

But this was not what Ally wanted.

The thing to be done was to strike up an acquaintance with this mysterious personage, and extract what information he could from him.

As Ally reached this conclusion he lighted a cigarette to give him an air of unconcern, and emerged from his concealment, seating himself upon an empty box very much like that of which the stranger had taken possession.

The young detective was now in full view.

The man on the opposite side of the jagged hole in the deck needed only to raise his eyes to see him.

For nearly a minute, as Ally quietly drew his cigarette, this recognition was adjourned.

It was the smoke of the tobacco that at length fixed the unknown's attention.

Starting violently, he looked nervously around.

"It's only me, sir," explained Ally.

The stranger gained his feet at a bound, carrying his hand to a concealed weapon, as his gaze encountered the lithe, active figure of the young detective.

"Happy to make your acquaintance," pursued Ally, as he arose and advanced toward the hole in the deck. "It is a novel entertainment—that of which I have just become a witness. You have a singular family of pets."

The stranger had flushed hotly at sight of the young man, and had then become correspondingly pale.

His massive frame shook violently.

He was visibly a prey to the liveliest alarm and terror.

He looked angry with himself for the surprise of which he had been the object.

"Who are you?" he asked, hardly noticing the amicable gestures of the other.

Ally smiled contentedly.

The question was just what he expected after what he had seen of the man.

"I am a casual pilgrim in your neighborhood," he replied. "And you, sir?"

The stranger bit his nether lip nervously, but had the presence of mind to remove his hand from his concealed weapon and to reply:

"I? I am one of the residents of the adjacent coast."

"You are not Mr. Fanshaw?" pursued Ally, uttering the first name that struck his imagination.

"Fanshaw? I don't know any such party."

"Ah, I see. You are Mr. Baxter."

"Baxter? There's nobody of that name on the coast, young man. My name is Riloff."

"A Russian name, is it not, sir?"

Riloff assented.

"The *offs* are all Russian, I believe, and northern Russia at that," said Ally, as pleasantly as loquaciously. "One of my friends is a Russian gentleman whose name ends in *off*, and I have contrived to pick up a number of words in his language."

"Indeed."

The tone of Riloff, like his manner, was a sufficient proof that this information was quite unexpected and disagreeable.

"But you have not told me who you are," pursued Riloff, as he made his way cautiously around the hole in the deck to Ally's more immediate presence. "Are you a Virginian?"

"Yes, sir; and as such I must express my surprise at finding a Russian on this coast. I was not aware of the presence of a single Russian in Virginia."

"Oh, there are several," assured Riloff, with a sort of involuntary frown. "But I have as little as possible to do with my native land and language, or even with my countrymen. I am an exile."

The young detective looked so surprised at this statement that Riloff hastened to add:

"Some eighteen years ago I was arrested for taking part in a political meeting, and condemned, without trial or judgment, to exile in a distant village of Siberia for the rest of my life. Having been so fortunate as to make my escape, after two or three years, I resolved to pass the rest of my days in some foreign country, and at length, after several halts by the way, I have established myself permanently upon this coast."

Ally bowed assent, but he did not feel in the least tempted to accept these declarations as the truth.

He had remarked that there was not the least trace of a foreign accent in the language of Riloff, and had also noticed that the speech of the man, at the moment of addressing the sharks, had been much more illiterate than at present, as if he were now making every effort to express himself properly.

"Ah, I see how you came here," ejaculated Riloff, with an abrupt change of subject, as he glanced over the side, "that is your boat? You have come down the bay?"

Ally assented, with an air of indifference.

"And you have passed the night here?"

"Better than that," replied Ally. "I have taken possession of the wreck. I am going to remain here a number of weeks or months, possibly as long as the wreck holds together."

"How strange!" Riloff could not help saying.

"Yes, sir, I have come here to stay," declared Ally impressively. "I, too, am of a gloomy turn of mind, and the proceedings of these ferocious creatures will afford me a pleasant distraction. To be frank with you, Mr. Riloff," and he took the arm of the strange Russian in a friendly grasp, as if carried away by a sudden and irrepressible burst of confidence, "I have seen great sorrows as young as I am."

"Sorrows!" repeated Riloff, as if he could not accept the evidence of his hearing, in view of the fresh and handsome face of his new acquaintance.

"Yes, sorrows," assured the young detective, with increased vehemence. "The truth is, I have been rejected by the only girl I ever loved—definitely and scornfully rejected—turned out into the world, as it were, to die of a broken heart!"

At these words, and especially at the tragic air with which they were accompanied, Riloff burst into a laugh like the "roar of many waters."

"You?" he cried. "Such a mere boy! What a piece of nonsense!"

And Riloff laughed again.

"It's even so," declared Ally, as he ran his fingers through his hair, with a gesture any tragedian might have envied. "This untimely merriment palls upon my senses—stabs me like a knife! Were you ever rejected, Mr. Riloff?"

"No, my dear fellow. And if I had been, I should have simply said, 'Good riddance to bad rubbish.' I assure you!"

"Mr. Riloff, *oo taybeeah booelee chahkoo?*"

"A—what?"

The mysterious Russian looked puzzled.

"I mean to say what a head you have. You seem to think it the easiest thing in the world for a fellow to be rejected by his girl and go about his business as if nothing had happened. But I assure you that I have come here to play hermit; to bury myself in these solitudes; to avoid my fellow-beings, and especially all women, as if they were so many incarnate plagues!"

The merriment of Riloff again resounded.

He seemed to be delighted at discovering, (or at thinking he had discovered), that the young stranger had no other business in the neighborhood than to seek some solace for an unrequited passion.

"I am glad you have been frank with me, young man," he said, with an air which attested that he did not have the least doubt of the truth of the little romance Ally had so promptly invented. "Sit down upon that box again, and let us have a little further conversation. I think I can be of service to you."

Ally complied with the suggestion. Planting himself in an easy attitude on the deck, Riloff resumed:

"To begin with, my dear fellow, it's an act of perfect nonsense for any one, and especially for a boy like you, to give way to despair or disgust, because a flirt of a girl has given him the sack. There are just as good fish in the sea as have ever been caught. What a piece of folly it was for the young woman in question to reject you. You have not only youth and health, but you are decidedly good-looking, and you seem to be possessed of a reasonable degree of sense as well as good-breeding."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Riloff. You flatter me."

"I say, therefore, that this young woman, whoever she may be, is simply a fool to reject you," continued Riloff, applying himself to the supposed case in hand with an ardor worthy of a better cause. "It can't have been a question of money, or— But why pursue the subject? All you have to do is try over again."

"Easier said than done, Mr. Riloff."

"Nonsense. Let me give you a little advice. By the way, you haven't told me your name."

"It is Golos, sir—Harry Golos."

The mysterious Russian looked puzzled again. "I never heard the name of Golos before," he declared. "It sounds foreign rather than American. Is it common?"

"Oh, yes—in some places," and a barely perceptible smile wreathed Ally's lips. "You need only call me Harry. You were about to say—"

"Have you friends hereabouts, Mr. Golos?"

"Not hereabouts—no, sir. I must refer you to New York, Washington, and other places, for vouchers of my respectability. Perhaps you have heard of some of the people who know me. For instance, Mr. Carrollton, the Washington banker?"

"Oh, yes. I have heard of him."

"Well, this is what he thinks of me."

The young detective drew a paper from one of his pockets and placed under the gaze of his new acquaintance, who read as follows:

"The bearer, whose signature is appended, is a gentleman of good position and of the first respectability. He is hereby authorized to draw on me at sight for any sums of money of which he may have need."

To these lines was appended the name of "Henry Carrollton, banker," with date and address.

The eyes of Riloff brightened intensely.

"That is sufficient to cover almost any demand," he said, with a sigh of relief, as if he had nothing to fear from the cities named. "But you have not yet signed it."

"No, for the reason that I have not yet had occasion to draw any money," explained Ally, as he returned the document to his pocket. "But it tells you that I am not without friends, I hope!"

"It does indeed," declared Riloff, emphatically. "These proofs of your respectability, my dear fellow, suggest a plain and simple duty to me. All you need is a change of scene—a little fishing and hunting—a few sails on the bay—such society and companionship, in a word, as I am in a position to offer you!"

"You, Mr. Riloff?"

"Not exactly in my own person, since I am only an old exile, weighed down with disgusts and disappointments, but in younger and more agreeable companions. I have a son not far from your own age who has been in America from his childhood—so long indeed that you would never suspect him of being anything but a native-born American. This son I am expecting home from one day to another from a little trip he has been taking for his health, and I have no doubt you would find him a most charming companion. I think you can see our house from here," and Riloff gained his feet. "Yes, that is the place—that large stone edifice on that commanding bluff some three miles to the south of us. Of course you will take the word of a father for what it is worth, but I cannot refrain from adding that I have an only daughter, just turned seventeen, who is as nice a girl as can be found in the country."

"Indeed, Mr. Riloff. I am delighted to hear that you are so pleasantly situated."

"No doubt your first desire is to look about a little," pursued the mysterious Russian, "and I am glad to see that you are likely to have a splendid day for this purpose. For to-day, therefore, I will not press our hospitality upon you. But to-morrow—let's see, suppose we say nine o'clock in the morning?—I will either come for you, or you shall come to the house, just as you please, and we will pass the day together."

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Riloff," said Ally, extending his hand. "I accept your kind invitation with the greatest pleasure. I will surely come."

Riloff pressed the hand of the young detective heartily, and with an ill-concealed smirk of delight upon his half-averted face, and then turned away and regained his boat, into which he bounded with an agility worthy of a boy.

"Do not disappoint us, my dear fellow," he added, as he pushed off. "We shall make sundry preparations suitable to the occasion."

"Oh, I will be there punctually at nine o'clock," assured our hero. "Depend upon me, Mr. Riloff."

He continued to look after the mysterious Russian, occasionally making friendly gestures, until the boat had vanished behind the headland where it had first been seen, and then he turned and sauntered toward the cabin.

"He has gone, then?" queried Mark, opening the doors of the cabins as his comrade approached them.

Ally nodded.

"Who and what is he?"

"He's the man we took him to be," answered our hero, descending the companionway. "As we supposed, he was not aware of our presence. He came here to feed his pets—those sharks! I learned from his chatter to them that he has been baiting them with the especial view of getting rid of any detectives who may intrude upon him!"

"Ha! By Jove, that's suggestive!"

"Oh, he's the man we were after," assured Ally contentedly. "He pretends to be a Russian exile, and calls himself Riloff, but I readily discovered his claims to be unfounded. For instance, I asked him, in Russian, 'Have you a watch?' and he did not understand. I told him my name is Harry Golos, and this name, too, he failed to recognize. *Golos* is the Russian word for voice. The man's no more Russian than we are."

"Then what is he?"

"An impostor, clearly enough, and most likely a daring and desperate villain. He'll turn out to be the head of the torpedo gang. I also believe him to be the abductor of Mrs. Weatherbee, as he muttered a reference to some woman, with a great deal of indignant feeling."

"But how are we going to smoke him out?"

"I have already opened a road to that end. He says he has a son about my own age, and a daughter of seventeen. What's more to the point, he has invited me to come and spend tomorrow with him."

"And nothing was said about me?"

"Naturally not. Mr. Riloff is not even aware of your existence. I told him a romantic bumper about having been jilted by a girl, and explained that I come here to feed on melancholy and solitude."

"And you are really going to call on him?"

"Of course. You may rest assured that I shall return somewhat the wiser from the proposed visit."

"I only hope it will not be a disagreeable sort of wisdom," suggested Mark. "There may not be a word of truth in what the fellow told you. There may be no daughter at all in the case—no son. What you may find awaiting you at his house is likely to be a gang of cut-throats."

The proposed visit was discussed for hours, in all its promises and bearings, and the day closed for the two young detectives in a thousand tantalizing conjectures.

The time was getting on toward nine o'clock on the following morning, when Ally Webber took possession of the boat and rowed away to the nearest point of the coast.

It had been arranged that Mark would wait and watch for the return, but that he would not expect his friend at any particular hour—in fact, not till he saw him.

Nevertheless, as the long day wore away and night approached, and the best glass in Mark's possession had not once represented the form of his friend, either at the residence of Riloff or in the adjacent grounds, the watcher began to be terribly anxious. How was the young detective enjoying himself? What had happened?

CHAPTER IV.

A PEARL STRANGELY SET.

AFTER a brisk walk of half an hour, Ally Webber found himself near the residence of Riloff, which was simply one of those stately old manor-houses that belong to a former generation.

To the rear of it were cultivated fields, where numerous laborers were busy, with horses and implements, and not far away were grouped small houses of wood and stone, evidently the abodes of these toilers.

Ally was in the act of traversing a well-worn and shaded path, when the sharp report of a rifle resounded close at hand, and a bullet whistled dangerously near him.

A faint patch of smoke hovering above a dense cluster of bushes a few rods away told him clearly enough whence the shot had been fired, and the next instant a young girl bounded into view, rifle in hand, looking strangely startled.

She was as "pretty as a picture!"

Her full, round cheeks were rosy with health and exercise, and as smooth and lineless as if she had never known a care or a sorrow.

Her features were regular, and there was a strange and piquant vivacity in their expression.

Her eyes were large and keen, and even more vivacious than her features, with extraordinary glows and shadows in their clear depths.

Her hair was long and glossy, and of the same intense blackness as her eyes, and it was arranged upon her finely-poised head and around her brow with a skill suggestive of a maid or a coiffeur.

"Oh, sir, have I killed you?" she faltered, in regretful and remorseful accents.

"Not a bit of it," assured Ally, smilingly, as he raised his hat with a graceful flourish and inclined himself profoundly.

"I had no suspicion of your presence, sir," pursued the girl, the color returning to her face. "The truth is, I have been too much absorbed in watching a hawk which has been worrying my chicks. Ah, there he is now. Excuse me, sir!"

She raised her weapon as she spoke, sighting the object of her disfavor, and in another moment it fell dead within a few yards of her.

Ally picked up the bird and saw that the ball had traversed its body and heart.

"You see how dangerous I could be if I had occasion," said the young girl archly, as she tossed her rifle into the hollow of her arm. "But have no fear. I am not in the habit of welcoming strangers so rudely as—as that chance shot would imply."

She looked down with a confused and troubled air, while a swift flush mantled her cheeks.

"I am sure there is no occasion for either apologies or explanations," assured Ally. "Let change the subject to one less painful for you. Are you Mr. Riloff's daughter?"

The girl started, a marked curiosity chasing the gloom from her face.

"You know my father, then?" she murmured, as she allowed the young detective to smilingly confiscate her weapon.

"I have met him."

"Then I am sure I need not regard you as an utter stranger," said the girl, with shy but admiring glances. "I am here quite accidentally. The truth is, I have had a little scene with my father. He wanted me to dress and look my best to meet some sailor man in the parlor at nine o'clock, and I suddenly conceived such an aversion to his wish that I seized my rifle and made my escape by the back door. But you are smiling at something."

"Merely at the trick fate seems to have played us," explained Ally, as his smile deepened. "Is it not odd? I am the visitor your father referred to, although I do not exactly recognize myself as the 'sailor-man' of your graphic description."

"Oh, sir—excuse me!"

The girl's gaze fell, and she seemed overwhelmed with confusion.

"I—I am very sorry I have been so rude, sir," she faltered. "If I had known—if I could have foreseen who was coming—"

She paused again in charming embarrassment.

"You would not have run away to avoid me, perhaps?" suggested Ally, with an admiration which rendered his voice almost tender. "I am sure there is nothing to regret. We shall be friends, I hope."

"Here's my hand upon it!"

The young detective pressed to his lips a moment the tips of the fingers that were gracefully extended to him, and then turned his face toward the manor.

"Are you in any hurry to retrace your steps?" he asked.

"Not at all, sir. As you see, we are within sight from the house, and especially from the 'Lookout,' that tower to the left, where father remains a great deal to watch the ships which come and go. I dare say he's there now. If so, he has only to turn his head to see us."

"Then let us sit down here a moment," proposed Ally, indicating a seat offered by a vine-clad stone wall. "I shall be glad to exchange a few words with you."

The young girl acquiesced as promptly as politely, and Ally assisted her to take a comfortable position on the top of the wall, his heart throbbing at the touch of her hand, with a sweet, strange gladness.

"There," she ejaculated. "Sit down upon that rock, if you please—where I can see you," and she smiled, with arch brightness. "Now, what shall we talk about? I am quite at your disposal."

The young detective took the seat indicated, and bent a keener glance than ever upon his fair companion, his soul looking from his eyes, a telltale glow upon his manly features.

With every word they had exchanged, his respect for the fair girl had deepened, as had his admiration of her beauty, sweetness, and innocent candor.

"Your father did not tell me your name," he suggested, with a smile as caressing as his voice.

"It is Olga."

"You are not Russian?"

"Oh, dear—no. I hardly know what I am. There is some strange mystery about me—about my position here," and her voice was as low as sad, while vivid flushes came and went upon her features. "Sometimes I fancy Mr. Riloff is not my father, only my guardian. His conduct does not respond at all to my ideal of a father. Pardon me if I seem to be speaking too frankly to a stranger. I cannot deceive you in any way concerning papa or myself. May I go a step further?" and the gaze of the maiden's great liquid eyes settled solemnly upon his face. "You are the first real gentleman I have seen since I returned hither from school. I find myself alone, in strange and incomprehensible surroundings, and feel as much out of my real place as if I were in the Desert of Sahara. More," and her eyes grew nervously luminous, "I foresee that the hour is not far distant when my position here may become one of positive peril. There are shadows gathering around me which I can only darkly and vaguely outline. It is at such a moment that you arrive here—I know not whence; I know not for what purpose. But I believe that there is an Infinite Hand which guides all our goings and comings, if we seek to know the Infinite Will behind it, and I am sure I may claim your protection, the necessity arising."

Ally Webber was touched deeply, and his true, earnest soul seemed concentrated in his eyes, as he responded:

"Your confidences are sacred, nor am I surprised at them. I probably comprehend your situation here, even better than you comprehend it yourself. I, too, am a believer in that Infinite Hand to which you have alluded, and I have no doubt that our meeting is destined to be fateful. I am sure that our lives are ordained to have more than this one moment of contact, and it may not be too much to say that I have been sent here providentially to stand between you and the coming perils to which you have so feelingly alluded."

The maiden sighed, and continued:

"My mother died at such an early period of my life that I cannot remember her, and my father—if Mr. Riloff is my father—is one of the most taciturn, gloomy and disagreeable of men. He is figuring here as a Russian exile, but I have accidentally overheard him telling a guest he was born in London. I never had a sister, and my only brother has been away almost constantly at school and college since his childhood. I have had my flower garden, my books and my music, my *bonne*, my governess, to say nothing of my household duties, and I have even hunted and fished. But, with such resources as these—with no society, for a couple of years past, save that of an old housekeeper who is as deaf as a post—you can imagine how lonely I have been, how heavily time has hung upon my hands, and how ready I have been to catch, like a drowning man, at such straws as have come in my way!"

The words were poured forth in one swift torrent of uncontrollable gloom and bitterness.

"One final remark," added Olga. "I have divined at a glance that you are a man of honor. What I say to you is said in the strictest confidence. My loyalty to you and to truth must not cease to be loyalty to my father and brother. You will not suppose for a moment that I am capable of betraying the one or the other. I am sure that you will be as discreet as you are doubtless good and generous."

"This is understood between us, of course," said Ally. "You can speak to me as to a brother."

"Then let me explain the situation a little more clearly," pursued Olga. "Why my father pretends to be a Russian I cannot even imagine. Sometimes I think he is a little wrong in his mind. It is certainly an act of rashness to pretend to be a Russian when he knows scarcely a word of the language."

"It is, indeed. I readily detected yesterday that Mr. Riloff is not a Russian. I am a little acquainted with that language and so made use of a few Russian words in our conversation."

"And papa did not comprehend them?"

"No more than if I had spoken Chinese."

The girl heaved a deep sigh.

"Perhaps there is some motive more or less pressing, some reason more or less vital, why your father should take such a strange course," suggested Ally. "May he not have left England in some disgrace? Pardon my freedom. May he not have deadly enemies from whom he thinks it necessary to hide?"

"Any or all of these suggestions may be quite correct," admitted Olga. "That papa has long been preoccupied with some grave trouble, or with some great business care is perfectly certain. He does not sleep as he used to. He is not the man he used to be, even three years ago. And such strange people as he has around him! I find him stirring at all hours of the night, and I will add that he seems to be busy with schemes and measures of which I can form no clear conception!"

What precious avowals for Ally!

He congratulated himself upon the assistance he had secured and the progress he was making. "May it not be," he suggested, "that your father is troubled by the scenes which have re-

cently taken place in this vicinity? I refer particularly to the loss of the Hester and the Alaska."

The girl looked up quickly as if some new thought had struck her.

"True," she responded. "These scenes have been enough to fret and pain a less impressionable man. From one of these ships, the Hester, which carried some forty-five or fifty persons, all told, there was hardly a life saved, hardly a body recovered. They were devoured by sharks, with which the bay in this vicinity is literally crammed!"

Ally gained his feet a little abruptly and began walking to and fro, as is so natural when any one is oppressed with excitement.

"And what is your idea of the torpedo-men, Miss Riloff?" he asked, with assumed carelessness. "Have you ever seen any of the torpedoes or submarine boats which have accomplished these destructions?"

"Never, sir. All I have seen is sundry accounts of torpedoes, sundry engravings and descriptions which I have remarked among the books in papa's study. But, as far as I can judge, they must be among the most dreadful engines of destruction that man has invented. It is stated in some of the descriptions in question that these boats can remain under water for hours, or even days, and that they can be propelled at race-horse speed in any desired direction. Is such really the case, sir?"

"Oh, without doubt," assured Ally. "I have looked into the question enough to know that."

Olga leaped lightly down from the wall, as if oppressed by the turn the conversation had taken, and led the way toward the manor, toying nervously with a wild rose she had plucked.

"We begin to get a fine view of your father's estate," observed Ally, walking by her side, and looking appreciatively around.

"Yes," confirmed Olga. "The manor-house, as you see, is built upon a bold projection between two creeks of such width and depth that large ships can enter them. They carry, even to the rear of the house, some ten or twelve fathoms of water. The depth of the bay in front of the house is even greater, and, as you will see later from the front, the promontory on which the house stands is perpendicular from its base to its crest—more than a hundred feet."

"A wild and gloomy spot enough," commented Ally. "And what a stronghold naturally! The house seems to be approached from the rear only by the narrow isthmus we are now traversing."

"Such is the case, sir. I understood papa to say that you are stopping at the wreck and that you intend to remain there some weeks?"

"Yes. I am particularly interested in the Alaska and in the circumstances of its destruction. Among the passengers of this ship was Colonel Broadwell, Chief of Police of Baltimore, who was formerly connected with a penitentiary in one of the northern counties of Maryland. How the colonel came to be upon the Alaska, where he was going, and what was his business, are points I need not here touch upon. Suffice it to say that the colonel was among those uninjured by the explosion; that he was one of the last to descend into the boat alongside after the ship was beached where she now lies, and that he was seen and conversed with after the survivors reached the shore abreast of the wreck; but that, from that moment, Colonel Broadwell has vanished from human eye and knowledge as completely as if he had fallen into the jaws of a shark!"

"Indeed, sir! I thought the survivors all took refuge aboard of a steamer that appeared opportunely, and returned to Baltimore?"

"And so they did—with the solitary exception of Colonel Broadwell. It has been suggested that he may have returned to the wreck for some valuables left behind, and tumbled into the hold through the hole in the forward deck. Did any of the survivors come to the manor?"

"Yes, one only, who went away immediately," answered Olga, without the least hesitation.

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly. I saw him myself, and gave him refreshments with my own hands."

"Would you know him again if you were to see him?"

"Without doubt, sir."

The young detective drew a photograph from a side-pocket of his coat—a receptacle, he it added, which seemed full of private documents—and held it up to the gaze of Olga.

"Is that the man?" he asked.

The girl started violently, with a cry of recognition.

"Yes, that is the man!" she answered.

"And he left the manor, you say? You saw him take his departure?"

"No. Papa mentioned the matter, in reply to a question addressed to him."

"I see, Olga. That man was the Chief of Police of Baltimore. From the hour when he left the manor, on that fatal day, three months ago, no human eye, so far as is known, has seen him."

There was a brief silence, the girl looking troubled, as if some disagreeable thought or suggestion had assailed her.

"But this is a circumstance I mention to you in the strictest confidence," added Ally. "Please keep my secret as sacredly as I shall keep yours. For the present we will say no more about these matters. I dare say your father is wondering where I am, and why I do not put in an appearance at the manor."

"Oh, dear—no. There he is on the top of the Lookout," returned Olga, with a slight start. "He has seen us. He is aware that we are quite safe."

And waving her handkerchief gayly, she accepted the arm Ally politely offered, and the couple quickened their steps toward the dwelling, their hearts beating with emotions as delightful as novel.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUBMARINE BOATS.

WITH the coming of night the anxiety to which we left Mark Sherman, Ally's comrade, naturally deepened to apprehension.

"Where can he be?" muttered Mark, as he ascended to the deck of the Alaska, for at least the twentieth time. "Ah! there he is now!"

He had detected his leader in the act of pushing off from the shore, and in another minute Ally was alongside.

"You have come just in time to save me from a jolly fit of anxiety," greeted Mark. "I began to fear—"

"Caution!" whispered Ally, as he came up the side.

"Caution? What's up?"

"There's a light in the bay, just abreast of us."

"You mean a light on the bay."

"No, in the bay, a long distance below the surface. The light of a submarine boat, no doubt."

He advanced to the starboard side of the wreck, and looked seaward.

"Ah! there it is," he whispered; "not a hundred yards away. They are reconnoitering."

It was a faint, dim light, gleaming from the very depths of the waters.

"Sure enough," assented Mark. "Let's chase it."

Gaining their boat, they rowed noiselessly seaward, placing themselves directly over the spot where the mysterious light had been seen. "Listen!" then enjoined Ally, resting on his oars.

Far down in the water was heard the clank of an engine—very faint, to be sure, as if great care had been taken to have all its parts as admirably adjusted as possible—but none the less a well-defined sound of a screw in movement.

"It is steaming away—and rapidly," said Mark, continuing to listen. "We can follow its movements with the ear. It's beating a retreat."

"And we had better do likewise," suggested Ally, "for fear they may have left an inquisitive torpedo behind them."

The couple returned to the "Alaska."

"And now for your report, Ally," demanded Mark, eager and excited. "Tell all you have heard, seen, or done."

Ally hastened to comply.

"Good!" was Mark's comment. "That girl is a trump! But all she says shows that Riloff is the head of the torpedo gang. She's really 'giving away' the old man without knowing it! Think she's his daughter?"

"No, Mark."

"Have any idea who she is?"

"Yes, my boy, but not one sufficiently developed to talk about."

"You had a chance to look over the premises?"

"Yes, but hardly through them! I got very little information after reaching the house. Riloff received me pleasantly—was very polite and attentive, in fact—but he seemed to be on his guard every moment. Perhaps he is aware that his daughter is not as guarded as she ought to be, from his point of view, and he may not have been exactly delighted at the rapid way in which I walked into her good graces."

"You had a nice dinner, of course?"

"The best of everything, with the best of wines, the costliest of plate and china, the finest of linen," declared Ally. "The place is twice as large as it looks from the sea, and there's deep water on three sides of it. Riloff has any quantity of books, sea charts, and marine glasses, and his study is furnished as if he were the possessor of millions!"

Mark raised his hand warningly.

"I hear oars," he whispered.

In an instant the couple were on deck.

A dozen rods away a dark spot was visible on the surface of the water.

This spot was soon resolved into a small boat in which was a solitary oarsman.

The man had ceased rowing and was looking anxiously around.

"Come on!" called Ally. "This is the place."

The man came alongside with a few light and rapid strokes, and the young detectives hastened to greet him.

He was a tall, fine-looking person, in the prime of life, with a bustling air of business.

"I have an idea that I have been followed

from Baltimore," was his first remark, as he climbed up the side. "But if so, I have shaken the fellow off during the last hour, with the aid of the darkness."

"I hope you have brought us good news, Mr. Podder," said Ally eagerly.

"The best in the world, sir!" declared Podder, emphatically. "The boat is finished, and proves a greater success than we dared to hope. There is not another such craft in existence!"

Ally flushed with delight.

"As you know, Mark," he explained, turning to his comrade, "Mr. Podder is one of the most eminent boat-builders in America. As soon as it was arranged with Mr. Weatherbee that I was to come here to unearth—perhaps I ought to say *fish out*—these torpedo-men, I submitted sundry ideas in regard to a submarine boat, and he engaged Mr. Podder to carry them out."

"And yonder comes the boat," said Podder, with a gesture in the direction from which he himself had come.

"What! that thing there—like a whale's back?" asked Mark, in astonishment, as he marked a dark object moving slowly toward the wreck on the surface of the water.

"Yes. Here it comes. Help me secure it to the wreck."

This was soon done.

"There you are," commented Podder. "I leave you in possession. Don't ask me to remain even long enough to take a drink. I'll distance that pursuer if I can!"

In another moment he had regained his skiff, and in less than a minute had vanished as quietly as he had come.

"And now to take a look at our boat, Mark," said Ally. "What a beauty she is!"

They had scarcely descended to the new craft, when a mysterious sound was heard beneath them, evidently proceeding from its interior.

"Who's there?" called Ally.

"Guess who?" was the answer.

"It's Captain Drake," cried Ally, joyfully.

"Mr. Weatherbee said he'd send him down the bay secretly, and here he is. Ah!"

A further sound was heard beneath the couple, and the mysterious boat began to rise higher and higher in the water, a sort of hatchway quickly becoming visible.

The next instant the hatch was raised from within, and Captain Drake made his appearance in the opening, looking smilingly around.

He was not far from sixty years of age, and as gray as a grizzly.

He had commanded several torpedo ships during the war, and in this capacity had gone to the bottom more than once, but he had always managed to crawl out in time to save his life, and these narrow escapes, instead of disgusting him with the danger of his calling, had simply inspired him with confidence in his ability to take care of himself in any emergency likely to befall him.

"So, here you are, boys," he said, in a cheery voice, as he partially crawled out of the hatchway, and held out his brawny hands to the young detectives. "How are you getting on?"

"Splendidly, Captain Drake," answered Ally. "And you? Have you come from Baltimore in these close quarters?"

The captain assented.

"Been comfortable?"

"Never more so. To be frank with you, we've had the hatch off part of the time, but only for convenience."

"How does the air-pump work?"

"Just as you said it would. The same stroke which pumps the old air out pumps the fresh air in, making a continuous stream, as it were, through the hold. We have experienced no inconvenience whatever."

"We? Who's with you?"

"A complete crew; three steerers, a fireman, an engineer and three gunners—eight persons without counting myself."

"Then you are all ready for business at a moment's warning?"

"Yes. Mr. Weatherbee thought we had better arrive with the boat. As you rightly suggested, we do not know how well the spy system of the torpedo gang is organized, and it is possible that they will be informed before morning of our arrival in these waters. Have you made any discoveries?"

"Yes, several, the best of which is that we caught a glimpse of a submarine boat not long ago just abreast of us."

"Good!" commented Drake. "We'll soon give the scoundrels plenty of trouble. They are far behind us in every respect, especially in their lighting apparatus and in their arrangements for a supply of fresh air. But come and see for yourselves."

He beat a retreat into the interior of the submarine boat, and the young detectives followed him.

The craft was shaped very much like an ordinary cigar, being perfectly round, and pointed at each extremity. It was built of steel plates, the various pieces being carefully riveted together.

Almost the entire exterior was thickly covered by what at first sight appeared to be scales,

but which were really the lids of as many air-chambers, of greater or less depth, some of them extending half the length or breadth of the singular vessel.

These various air-chambers were all under control from the interior of the boat, and were so placed that they were in themselves a sufficient contrivance not merely for sinking the boat and bringing it to the surface at will, but also for giving either end any desired elevation or depression, and consequently for enabling it to move through the water at any desired angle.

In a word, the Water Witch—for such was the name Ally had bestowed upon the craft—could be made to descend into the ocean and to ascend from its depths quite as surely, if not as readily, as a bird can elevate itself or descend in the air.

The upper deck, or the upper surface of the boat, if that term should seem more appropriate, was liberally supplied with dead-lights, especially in the center.

The total length of the Water Witch was sixty feet, and its greatest diameter eight feet, eleven inches.

A couple of lanterns were pending from the ceiling of the boat, and by the light thus furnished the young detectives readily made out the objects around them, including the figures of the crew.

"These are my men, Mr. Webber," observed Drake, by way of introduction. "Some of them are strangers to you; but none of them are ignorant of your name and reputation, and all will be glad to achieve new triumphs in your company."

Salutations were exchanged, and the young detectives accepted the seats offered them.

Near the center of the boat, upon a stout bedplate, was the engine, with the gearing necessary to put the screw in movement.

The screw shaft, like that of an ocean steamer, was of a size and weight corresponding to the screw it carried.

There was a considerable supply of coals in boxes near the furnace, and plenty of combustibles more easy to burn were accumulated elsewhere, including several large cans of petroleum.

"There is no danger that the thing will turn bottom up, is there?" asked Mark.

"Not the least," answered Drake. "While the bedplate and engine pull one side downward, the air chambers pull the opposite side upward, thus establishing a sure and sound equilibrium."

"There is no trouble about steering?" queried Ally.

"No," was the captain's answer. "The steerer is placed in that perch in front of the hatchway, in such a position as to see everything ahead of him."

"But how about ascending or descending?"

"These movements are produced by a wide-bladed iron oar, which projects forward, and is raised or depressed to any desired angle by a curious contrivance."

"The action of this oar is sure?"

"As prompt and sure as the rudder. You understand, of course, that the boat, when submerged, is almost in a state of equilibrium. If we desire to descend deeper, we must admit the water into an additional number of the air-chambers. If we desire to rise toward the surface, we expel the water from the necessary number of the air-chambers and admit the air. The whole process is as simple as working a pair of bellows."

Ally and Mark expressed their admiration.

"Of course it will take you some time to note all the features of the little beauty," pursued Drake. "In fact, you must see her in action before you can form any adequate idea of her. But you will find, Ally, that your ideas have been carried out by Mr. Podder, with only two slight modifications I have taken the liberty of suggesting. What do you say, boys? Shall we take a little turn for your benefit?"

The young detectives replied affirmatively, and Captain Drake gave the necessary orders.

"We shall have steam in two minutes," he said, as he seated himself at a little table near the center of the interior. "Sit down here, Webber, and let me know the route you wish to take."

"We had better go seaward," suggested Ally. Drake nodded approvingly.

The table before him was covered with charts, all adapted for submarine navigation, as was indicated by various lines in red and blue upon them.

A few rapid glances enabled Ally to select a route, by which time everything was ready for a start.

The next instant the boat began moving.

"Due east," ordered Drake, addressing the steerer.

The captain followed the movements of a needle upon his table until it indicated the right course.

"Steady," he then commanded.

There was no necessity of speaking out.

The engine and screw worked almost in silence.

All the steam produced was turned into the

cylinder as fast as manufactured, and returned to the boiler as fast as condensed, the whole proceeding being accomplished with scarcely a sound.

"How fast are we moving, Webber?" suddenly asked Drake, as he examined a sort of button in the bow of the boat.

"About five knots, sir."

"We are going eleven, my boy. This is as fast as we will go to-night, Mr. Barker," he added, addressing his engineer, "inasmuch as we propose to descend to the bottom."

"As we go down, sir," said Mark, "please explain everything to us."

"With pleasure," answered Drake. "I will now begin to lower the bow of the boat by filling some of the forward air-chambers. Here are all the levers necessary to admit the water."

"Why, they are arranged in rows, like the keys of a piano," exclaimed Mark.

"Yes, and they are almost as easy to handle," returned the captain. "Thus," and he extended his hand, giving a slight movement to one of the handles in question, "by that simple act I give admittance to about a barrel of water into one of the air-chambers, and this quantity is quite sufficient to make a perceptible change in the position of the keel. Two or three more such movements," and he made them rapidly, "will make this depression of the bow still more marked."

There was no denying this fact.

The depression of the bow was already so great that Mark could not help expressing an apprehension in regard to it.

"I will now admit a corresponding quantity of water into the stern," said Drake, "and the Water Witch will then be four-fifths under water."

Such proved to be the case.

The water was heard to pass over the upper surface of the boat, like a swiftly-flowing stream over its bed, as the boat continued its progress.

A few further measures were taken by Drake, and the young detectives were then startled to find that floods of water were streaming across the skylights immediately over their heads.

"We are entirely submerged," exclaimed Mark.

"Yes," assented Drake. "We are descending about one foot in fifty, and shall reach the bottom in six fathoms at the end of a couple of minutes. The engineer is suspending the steam accordingly, and the boat is already moving slowly."

A brief interval of silence succeeded.

"There, we have reached the bottom," announced Drake, as a slight shock was experienced. "We have come to a halt. I will fill a couple additional air-chambers with water, and we shall remain as motionless as an oyster glued to a rock."

He executed the measure suggested, and then made a dot upon the chart before him.

"There is where we are," he said. "This point is just two miles due east of the wreck!"

Mark and Ally exchanged glances. It was for them a novel situation. The boat was lying motionless at the bottom of the bay!

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE DISCUSSION AT RILOFF'S.

"WELL, Olga, how do you like him?"

This question came from Riloff, as he and Olga turned to retrace their steps from the point—a mile to the northward of the manor—to which they had accompanied Ally on his return to the wreck.

"Very well, indeed," was the prompt answer.

The avowal was further strengthened by a blush that mantled the girl's features.

"I am not sorry to hear it," declared Riloff, with an air which attested his sincerity. "I have not learned all there is to know about his family and connections, but quite enough to tell me that he would be a good match for you. I hope to soon see you Mrs. Golos."

The girl blushed still more deeply.

For the first time in her life she was conscious of keeping grave secrets from the knowledge of her father.

To begin with, she knew that the name of their visitor was not Harry Golos, but Ally Webber. She also knew that his nearest friend was Mr. Hiram Weatherbee. Under the relations which had so promptly grown up between the young couple Ally had not hesitated a moment to set her right upon these points.

Little more was said until Riloff and Olga reached the manor, each being busy with a host of thoughts in which the other had no share.

"You may send Mrs. Arbuckle to me," then said Riloff, referring to the "old housekeeper as deaf as a post," to whom the girl had made allusion in her confidences to Ally. "I will be in my study."

He pursued his way alone to the room indicated, while Olga proceeded to the apartment of which Mrs. Arbuckle was the recognized possessor. Not finding her there, the girl began a quiet search through the dwelling for her, beginning with her own rooms.

This search also proving futile, Olga took her way toward her father's study to report the fact to him.

She had nearly reached her destination, when the discordant voice of Mrs. Arbuckle fell upon her hearing, proceeding from the study itself, and she at once comprehended that the housekeeper had been awaiting Riloff's return in that apartment.

"I tell you I'll not hear of her marriage to this Golos or Bolos, whatever his name may be," Mrs. Arbuckle was saying, her harsh and discordant voice more strident than ever. "It has always been understood between us that she should become the wife of Paul."

These were the words which arrested the steps of Olga, causing her to sink powerless into the nearest chair, the Paul in the case being Paul Riloff, her reputed brother.

There was a brief silence in the study, and then Riloff answered, in a voice indicative of forced calmness:

"You seem to be mounting a high horse to-day, Miranda; but I'll, nevertheless, humor you to the extent of showing you that you have no call to interfere with my projects. To begin with, Olga believes Paul to be her brother—"

"Well, how easy to tell her that Paul is my son as well as yours, and that she is not in any way related to any of us."

It was with a joy even greater than her surprise that Olga heard this declaration.

It was true then—that conviction which had so long been finding lodgment in her soul—that she was neither the daughter nor a relative of R.

What gladness in the thought!

"As a matter of fact, Miranda," was the slow and thoughtful response of Riloff, "Paul is not in the least attracted to Olga, under existing relations, and the only effect of telling him that she is not his sister would be a mild surprise. My opinion is that his whole thought and aim is to continue the spendthrift and dissipated career he has so long been running. I do not believe he has the least thought of marriage—the least thought of settling down at the manor or elsewhere. He is too contented with his present extravagances and dissipations. I realized long ago that it would be useless to think of a marriage between him and Olga. Her sentiments toward him have long been those of positive repulsion and reprobation."

"But she might marry him to reform him."

"She's no such fool."

"But why are you in such haste to get rid of her?"

"Why?" asked Riloff, sharply. "Because I have realized that she is no longer a heedless and thoughtless child, but a shrewd and keen-eyed woman. Because she cannot remain here much longer without becoming a positive peril. She is even in the way already. I hope she will soon make a match with this Mr. Golos, and in that case will give her one of the best houses in Richmond, or elsewhere, and so be rid of her!"

"Well, that's not my idea at all," declared Mrs. Arbuckle. "I'll never consent to give her a cent if she does not marry Paul. Another thing, since we are talking of marriage, is it not about time to keep your promise of a score of years ago, and make me your wife? I do not care whether you marry me under the name of Riloff, or under your real name, but marry me you must. You may be killed or arrested any day, as the result of the life you are leading, and in that case what would become of me?"

"Don't talk so loud, Miranda," enjoined Riloff, impatiently. "You seem to forget that I am not deaf. What's more, I don't wish to be bawling out these secrets here. If you really wish to talk with me, let us go out for a row on the bay, where no one can hear us—"

"And where no one would see or save me, if you were to upset the boat and swim ashore, leaving me to drown! No, no! I am no such fool as that, Mr. Riloff!"

The pretended Russian bit his lips.

"Then take a sail with me in the steam-yacht," he proposed, "where the clank of the engine will in a measure drown your voice! In any case, I must ask you not to undertake the discussion of these forbidden and dangerous subjects without a little more regard for our surroundings."

"I will discuss them when I like, and where I like," declared Mrs. Arbuckle, with grim energy and resolution. "If you don't consent within a week to marry me, I'll go and find Paul and tell him the whole story. More, I'll tell this girl all I know. I am tired of being known as a mere servant, a housekeeper, when I am by rights the mistress of the manor, and the proper heiress of every dollar in your possession. It is time for me to be making some provision for my old age. I have been your slave long enough. I have never refused to assist you in your schemes, and it is entirely owing to my superior smartness that they have been uniformly successful. What real reason, let me ask, have you for not keeping your lifelong promise to marry me?"

"Well, one reason is that there is no necessity of any such measure," replied Riloff. "You are as much the real mistress here as any one can be. The marriage you are howling about would not signify anything. It would merely be a subject of gossip to our servants and the

neighbors. Another reason that you ought to take into account is that you are several years my senior. I do not insist upon the point, nor do I advance the fact as a reason for not marrying you, but you ought to be generous enough to bear your age in mind!"

"My age!" almost shrieked Mrs. Arbuckle, her voice ringing out louder than ever. "If I was good enough for you in youth, I am good enough for you now, age or no age, and I'll soon make you know it! I see now what the trouble is," and her eyes glared jealously. "Your idea is, no doubt, to marry a younger and handsomer woman! No doubt you have your arrangements made already, and are only waiting for me to die a natural death, or to be put out of the way in some more expeditious fashion! But you won't get rid of me quite as readily as you have laid hands on some people, I can assure you!"

"Miranda," interrupted Riloff, and now his voice was stern, almost menacing, "I must ask you again to leave all these matters to some more suitable moment. Don't you see that the doors and windows are all open? What if Olga, not to speak of any one else, should chance to come in this direction?"

"If the doors are open, how easy to close them," exclaimed Mrs. Arbuckle, as she arose and closed the door of the study with a loud slam. "Besides, if you don't wish me to talk of these things, why not put an end to all talk by taking the action desired? In a word, why not make me your wife, and thus give some certainty to my future?"

These last words did not reach the hearing of Olga; the closing of the door having intercepted the voice of the speaker.

But she had heard enough!

She fled from the spot as if menaced by a pestilence, and did not pause until she had gained the silence of her own apartment, where she sunk into a chair, breathless and startled, unable to move or speak!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CRYSTAL GROTTO.

GIVING the young detectives barely time enough to take cognizance of their surroundings, Captain Drake remarked:

"A novel sensation, is it not, to be sitting here, at the bottom of the sea, as comfortable as you would be in a drawing-room? Let's open a bottle of wine, my lads, and drink to the success of the Water Witch, and of those in her."

The suggestion having been duly acted upon, and the best of good wishes and congratulations exchanged, the captain said:

"We'll now continue our voyage, Webber. The first step is to put the boat in equilibrium. As you see, it now rests like a stone on the bottom. A great storm might rage above us, and we should not feel the least evil effects from it. But, the moment I seize one of these levers and bring it back to the place where I found it—thus," and the captain again suited the action to the word, "I have begun expelling the water from the air-chambers. Just watch the process."

Continuing his movements, the Water Witch soon began to sway in its bed, like a bird poisoning itself for flight.

A minute more, and the young detectives perceived, as did the other occupants of the boats, by well-defined movements, that the boat had left the bottom, and was mounting toward the surface.

"There! we are off again," said Drake, resuming his seat at the table, and motioning the young detectives to join him. "You had better connect the battery with your third electric light, Andrews. We shall need to see where we are going."

The steerer made a simple movement or two with his hands, and a brilliant light suddenly appeared above his "perch," as Drake had called it, sending its rays far out upon the bottom ahead of the boat.

"You see, Webber," said the captain, "in addition to the ordinary arrangements for lighting the boat, we are prepared to project a powerful electric light upon any given point within fifteen or twenty rods of us. Even with the present light, which is next to our weakest, we could see to pick up a pin fifty yards ahead of us."

The fact was as stated.

A long thread of light shot out into the lower depths of the sea, but at the same time, by a clever arrangement of guards, was prevented from shooting up toward the surface.

A host of fishes, great and small, were seen to be moving about, more or less erratically, as if bewildered or curious, and every stone or weed, like every depression or projection of the bottom, was as plainly to be seen as if they had been presented under the full light of day on the surface of the earth.

The radiation of the light was entirely under control, so that it could be modified to any extent or instantly suppressed, to say nothing of its being instantly turned in any desired direction.

"What a strange scene!" exclaimed Mark.

"Mr. Andrews," called the captain to his

steerer, "we will now make a few circular movements, port and starboard, to show our friends how quickly and easily they can be accomplished. You may give her quarter speed, Mr. Barker, if you are ready."

These orders having been duly acted upon, the young detectives were delighted to perceive, by the different scenes and objects arriving upon their view, that the movements of the Water Witch could be compared only to those of some whale or other living monster in the act of disporting itself in the depths of the sea.

The boat had made three complete revolutions—two to port and the other to starboard—before the young detectives could find words to express their wonder.

"You may show us another form of movement," said Drake to his engineer and steerer.

"Give her third speed, Barker, and let her go up and down hill a half-mile or so, in an easterly direction."

"Up and down hill, captain?" ejaculated Mark. "What do you mean?"

"You'll soon see, my boy. Hold fast."

The boat continued on its course, but no longer in a circle nor in a direct line, but in a rapid succession of ascents and descents—now plunging swiftly down to the very depths of the sea, and now rushing up to the surface, until the bright moonlight without began showing itself through the thin veil of water by which the boat was covered.

"More and more strange!" cried Ally, flushing with delight. "The boat seems to be endowed with life!"

"And so she is," returned Drake, "since she responds to the thought of those in her. You are in every way pleased with her, Mr. Webber?"

"As pleased as surprised. Why should we not go in quest of the enemy at once—the torpedo gang?"

"There's nothing easier," answered Drake.

"You are prepared to meet them?"

"In every way. I have not yet had time to go into details, but we are literally bristling with all the necessary engines of warfare and destruction!"

"Then let us go in search of these villains," proposed Ally. "Let's explore the waters near Riloff's."

Drake complied with the suggestion, after studying his charts a few moments.

"We'll go slow, Barker," he said to the engineer. "The bottom is anything but smooth, and there is no telling at what moment we may encounter the boat of the enemy."

"Would you fear to encounter it?" asked Ally.

"Fear!" ejaculated the captain. "I should make such quick work of her that the villains aboard of her would hardly know what swept them out of existence! Have you seen Riloff?"

"On several occasions. Permit me to give you details."

The revelations that succeeded interested Drake greatly.

"The headquarters of the torpedo gang are doubtless in this vicinity," he commented. "But we must look for them only where the water is deep and the shore prominent. It is mentioned in Hossack's Virginia, as one of the traditions of the red-skins, that there is an immense cave, or subterranean grotto—the Crystal Grotto, it was called—somewhere in this neighborhood, but I am not aware that any living man has ever seen it, or that there is the least tradition concerning its precise location."

"It would be a waste of time, no doubt," said Ally, "to seek the grotto in question. But it must exist near the Riloff premises if it exists at all. Not only is the promontory high, but the water is deep on each side of it, and the rock is of a kind in which one always found more or less openings, or 'faults.' From the configuration of the coast it is easy to see that all easterly gales must drive into the nearest of these creeks with great violence, and it is possible that we may find some indications of the cave there. I say indications, for the simple reason that the grotto of tradition, if it ever existed, may have long since been washed away completely, and may have even occupied the very spot where the creek is now deepest."

"Shall we look into these creeks?" asked Drake.

"Yes, sir," replied Ally. "But we had better go at a snail's pace, taking good account of every object we leave behind us. I think it would be possible, too, to suppress part of that light."

"I was intending to take these measures a little later," said Drake, conveying the necessary intimations to his men by rapid gestures. "We must omit no precaution."

The electric light having been almost suppressed and the speed of the boat reduced to its minimum, the scene around the submarine explorers presented itself under stranger aspects than ever.

"As you see," resumed Captain Drake, again bending over his charts, "there is a sort of channel leading from the bay to the creeks. The bottom is in almost all cases a fine sand, and it is as free from rocks and other obstacles as could be expected."

"We are following this channel?" queried Ally.

"As rigidly as possible."

He gave an additional order or two to the steerer and then resumed:

"With the light we are now showing we can enter the creek unseen, even if old Riloff should be looking down upon the water from one of the windows of his house. In fact, if he is the chief of the torpedo gang, as we suppose, he'd only take us for his own boat if he were to see us. Suppose we enter the left creek first and sail entirely around its principal basin, keeping a strict watch for a subterranean opening in the rocky wall inclosing it?"

"A good idea," declared Ally.

Captain Drake continued to give orders to his engineer and steerer, and at the end of a considerable interval announced that the boat had arrived at the deepest part of the creek, abreast of the Riloff Manor.

"Keep alongside the base of the cliff, Andrews, to the left," ordered Drake, "and turn your light in the same direction. Steady, Barker! we must go slow."

The boat went on, Ally and Mark watching its progress, and had nearly completed the tour of the circular basin presented by the creek when the steerer uttered a suppressed cry.

"Yonder is an opening, sir, which leads into a smaller circular basin," he announced, "and I think it is the entrance of the grotto!"

"Go on, then! Examine the smaller basin."

Another exciting minute, during which Ally and Mark almost held their breath, and then came a sharp cry of joy from Drake.

"Stop her!" he ordered, as he sprang to his levers. "We might come to the surface!"

He began expelling the water from the air-chambers as rapidly as possible, and gradually the boat thus lightened made its way upward.

"Out with all lights," was the next order.

Total darkness succeeded, but only for a few brief instants, and then a new light began dawning upon the explorers through the skylights.

Captain Drake knew that the top of the boat was reaching the surface, and hastened to remove the hatch and look out.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated, in a startled whisper. "We are in the Crystal Grotto!"

The exclamation called Ally and Mark to his side.

Even Barker and the rest found it difficult to remain at their posts.

"Caution, all!" enjoined the captain, as he withdrew his head from the hatchway and surveyed his companions excitedly. "There is an immense arch of rock above us. Keep quiet and silent, all of you, while I take a look from the deck."

Ascending nimbly through the hatchway, he looked around with a wonder approaching stupefaction.

It was as he had said.

The boat was inclosed in rock, as it were, a broad and thick wall of rock descending into the water behind it.

In front of Drake, and even in contact with the boat, was a sort of natural wharf of rock, upon which a great variety of objects were lying.

Further away, at the head of this natural wharf, was a second immense circular opening, not less than a hundred feet in diameter, in the center of which a large fire was burning, giving to the place a strange glare and glow, and scattering a considerable flood of radiance even to the interior of the boat.

The arched roof of this central circular opening was supported in a number of places by stout columns and pillars of stone.

A sound of voices and laughter reached the ears of the intruder and was followed by the ringing of a hammer upon an anvil.

"Heavens!" repeated Drake, in a barely audible whisper. "It looks as if we were peering into the dominions of Pluto or Vulcan!"

He cast a swift glance around, looking for some crevice in which to conceal his little vessel.

Not being able to make out his surroundings as clearly as he could wish, he hastened to effect a landing, carrying to shore the end of a painter with him.

His eye having now become more accustomed to the gloom, he was able to make out that the rocky ledge he had landed upon extended entirely around the circular basin in which the boat was lying.

His decision was soon taken.

He would conceal his boat as far as possible from the landing-place aforesaid—namely, on the opposite side of the basin—and would then enter upon an elaborate investigation of his surroundings.

Tugging resolutely at the rope he held, he drew the boat to the spot indicated, making it fast to the rocky bank, with the aid of numerous projections which served as hitching-posts, and then returned to his companions.

"We have evidently stumbled upon the hiding-place of the torpedo gang," he reported, with an excitement corresponding to the importance of the information. "I have heard voices, and the

sounds of blacksmiths, hammering at their anvils. If you will come with me, Ally, with your friend, we'll explore the place, while the crew remain on the watch here, ready to skip with us at an instant's warning."

The young detectives expressed their joy at the project.

"Shall we need lanterns?" asked Mark.
"We will of course take our bull's-eyes," replied Ally. "They will doubtless be useful in exploring some of the nooks and corners of the grotto."

A few final injunctions and suggestions were given to the crew, and Drake then led the way to the deck, and thence to the rocky floor of the cavern.

"What are all these objects around us?" was the first whispered inquiry of Mark, as he endeavored to make out their nature.

Drake looked around, listening intently.
"Flash a ray of light upon them," he suggested.

Ally hastened to do so.
"Chiefly loose rocks, you see, which the torpedo men did not care to remove," resumed Drake. "They will afford us good hiding-places, if we need them."

"We seem to be at the extreme side of the cavern," observed Mark.

"Yes. We are in the ante-chamber, so to speak," declared Drake. "As much is proven by what we see. Here are numerous empty boxes, a quantity of fuel, a boat which has doubtless been used upon the waters of the grotto, and—yes, a sort of sentry-box!"

"Perhaps the sentry's in it," suggested Mark.

The mere possibility was startling.
It was not till the trio had examined the box and found it empty that they dismissed their apprehensions.

"We must now proceed cautiously, and yet boldly," proposed Ally, as he bent a keen glance around. "If we should be discovered, captain, can we beat a retreat to the 'Water Witch,' and get her out of the grotto before the enemy could interfere with us?"

"Yes, if we were not stopped by a bullet," was Drake's answer. "I have ordered Barker to keep the water in his boiler near the boiling point, and have also ordered several of the air-chambers to be filled with water, so that the boat can drop out of sight almost as soon as we get aboard of her."

"A good precaution, sir," said Ally. "That hammering to which you alluded seems to be continued. Shall we not move in that direction?"

Captain Drake assented, and the trio took their way in the direction indicated, with the double guidance of light and sound.

"Rather curious surroundings," observed Mark, as he stumbled into a cavity of the rocky floor, which had been left full of water by the latest tide. "But, better an occasional fall than to be discovered by the enemy. This is undoubtedly the place of which the old tradition has preserved the memory."

"Clearly enough," returned Ally, as he indicated by a gesture the white glare of the walls in the distance—those of the central opening. "You can see already why the name of Crystal Grotto has been affixed to it. The walls could not be whiter if they were composed of rock salt, like some of the famous grottoes of Poland."

A whisper of warning came from Drake, and he indicated by a gesture a number of gigantic shadows which had suddenly appeared upon one of the walls of the central grotto.

One of these shadows presented such a comical aspect that the intruders could not help smiling.

It was that of a man in a blacksmith's apron, with a hammer in his right hand, while his left was engaged in holding to his mouth a mug filled with whisky or some other agreeable beverage.

"We shall soon see more of them," pursued Ally. "There can be no doubt that this is the hiding-place of the whole gang. Caution!"

The trio pressed on in silence, but had not advanced a dozen additional yards, when, on emerging from the cover of one of the rocky pillars to which allusion has been made, their gaze suddenly fell upon a scene which caused them to step back quickly into the shadows from which they had advanced.

"What a sight!" Captain Drake could not help saying, in a barely audible whisper.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TORPEDO GANG.

THE hiding-place our friends had so boldly invaded was indeed the renowned Crystal Grotto. More than that, it was the retreat of the gang of outlaws of which Riloff was the master-spirit.

They were at least a score in number, and the majority chanced to be present.

They did not occupy the central grotto alone, but were scattered through the various galleries and ramifications leading from it, some of them having therein permanent quarters.

The aspect of all of them was in general brutal and repulsive, as if the wild lives they

had so long been leading had left a seal of reprobation upon their very features.

Two or three groups were engaged in playing cards, and as many more were gathered around rude tables, which were loaded with bottles and glasses, and with various sorts of food and refreshment.

The use of pipes was general, and in a number of places the smoke of tobacco hung permanently around the smokers.

As to the man with the hammer, whose portrait had been projected on the wall, he had finished his mug and departed, although the hammer and anvil were still visible at one side of the fire.

"I hope you are none the worse for your irons, Mike," said a voice, breaking a momentary silence.

"No, I am not, thank you," replied Mike. The intruders comprehended.

A prisoner had made his escape from some prison or officer, and had arrived at the Crystal Grotto still wearing his irons.

The aid of a hammer and anvil had accordingly been invoked to free him from his bondage, and this was the meaning of the hammering heard by the intruders.

As the latter watched and listened, they remarked a considerable bustle at one side of the grotto which indicated a new arrival.

"It's Cap'n Madder," exclaimed one of the outlaws. "He's back from Baltimore."

There was a general call for lights, and everybody hastened to meet the new-comer.

He was a tall, formidable-looking ruffian, with a full, freshly-shaven face, every portion of which was covered with lines as salient as a long career of crime could make them.

He was armed to the teeth, and displayed a marked, if subdued, excitement.

"You've had a nice trip, I hope, Captain Madder," greeted the man who had previously spoken, offering his hand.

"Yes, Trimm—excellent," was the answer.

"Any news—cap'n?"

"Yes, Trimm—yes, boys," and Madder sat down near the fire. "Another effort is to be made to find us. Mr. Weatherbee has sent two of the best young detectives in Baltimore to ferret us out. They are named Ally Webber and Mark Sherman."

Captain Drake and the young detectives exchanged glances of interest and surprise, and crouched as completely as possible into the crevice they had invaded, with the consciousness of being in a sufficiently critical situation.

A general buzz of wonder succeeded the announcement of Madder, who continued:

"The young shadows are already on our coast, boys, and have taken possession of the wreck of the Alaska as their headquarters. They have brought with them a great supply of provisions, with arms and ammunition. But this is not all. They have had a wonderful submarine boat built by Mr. Podder, at the expense of Weatherbee, and Mr. Podder has been down the bay to-night to deliver this boat to them."

The silence that succeeded was evidently the silence of consternation.

"A boat like ours, cap'n?" asked the man addressed as Trimm. "A boat like the Little Tiger, sir?"

"A boat as far ahead of the Little Tiger, my friends, as the Little Tiger is ahead of a tub or a gangway plank," declared Captain Madder emphatically. "I have had the pleasure of seeing her in action, since I have followed her down the bay."

Again the intruders comprehended.

Captain Madder could be no other than the spy to whom Podder had alluded.

"What is she like?" asked Trimm.

"Well, she's much like the Little Tiger outwardly," said Madder, "but inwardly she has been supplied with all the modern improvements. The Little Tiger will be here in a few minutes—yes, within ten minutes," and Madder looked at his watch, "when we shall have a further account of the new boat from Major Becker."

"Within ten minutes!" repeated Drake, exchanging startled glances with the young detectives. "Then it is high time to be moving. There is hardly room within the grotto for both of the boats, and it is morally certain that the Little Tiger could not arrive without discovering our presence."

No time was to be lost.

Indicating this circumstance by a gesture that was as graphic as any words could have been, Ally led the way back toward the Water Witch.

This retreat was not effected without noise, but the noise caused by Madder and his friends was considerably greater, so that the presence of the intruders was not detected.

The trio had nearly reached their boat when, chancing to look back, Ally saw that a door had been opened far up one of the lateral galleries of the grotto, and that a man had appeared therein, with a light in his hand, with the evident intention of paying the outlaws a visit.

This man was Riloff!

"Ah, a secret entrance," exclaimed Ally, calling the attention of his companions to this circumstance. "The grotto can be reached, it

seems, without crawling under that arched rock which bars the entrance from the sea. This is a point which we ought to investigate."

His resolve was instantly taken.

He checked his retreat abruptly.

"You see that there is no difficulty about getting away unheard and unseen?" he whispered.

Captain Drake assented.

"Then slip away as quick as you can and go back to the Alaska. I am going to remain here until I have mastered the secret of getting into this place by land."

"But the danger, my boy?" suggested Drake.

"I regard that as *nil*. Push on, both of you. I am anxious to see you vanish."

"If you insist, then—"

"I do, captain. Go!"

Captain Drake took the hand offered him, and hurried on to the boat, both he and Mark vanishing therein with nearly as much celerity as a rabbit exhibits in gaining his burrow.

The next moment the Water Witch sunk out of sight.

"I hope it'll get out before the Little Tiger gets in!" muttered Ally, looking after his friends and listening. "What if they would meet!"

The mere thought of such a possibility was enough to chain him to the spot where he stood.

He continued to watch and listen.

At the end of a couple of minutes a gleam of light flashed upon his gaze from the depths of the inner basin, and in a few moments thereafter he saw that the very spot where his boat had come to the surface was now occupied by a boat enough like it, as far as externals were concerned, to have been built from the same model.

"The Little Tiger, of course," he thought.

The hatch was opened, and several men came ashore, two of them carrying lanterns.

Once more Ally comprehended.

This boat was the one he had seen reconnoitering the wreck of the Alaska early in the evening.

And finally, it was the one which, according to Madder's suggestion, had been looking after the boat of the young detectives.

How had it arrived without seeing the Water Witch? And how had the Water Witch beaten its retreat from the Grotto without being seen?

These were the problems which puzzled Ally, holding him riveted to the spot.

Prominent among the persons landing from the Little Tiger was its commander, a fellow of the same type as Madder, who instantly found himself the object of general attention.

"You have seen her, major?" queried Madder, advancing to meet his comrade.

"Yes, captain," was Becker's answer. "And such a boat as she is—little less than a miracle! I have not seen her at full speed, and yet she went like a flash! I was never so astonished in my life. And when that boat had cruised as long as it cared to on the surface, it sunk into the water as quietly as a duck, and sailed high and sailed low, now to the right, now to the left, as if it were merely taking a bath for its own amusement. We were lying quiet on the bottom, in the very position to see all these marvelous capers. So near in fact, that I was afraid once or twice that the infernal thing'd come crashing into us."

"Why did you not send a shot at her?" asked Madder. "That is, send a torpedo to explode against the new craft?"

"I wasn't prepared for that measure, and did not have a good chance for it," replied Becker. "But I shall get her within an hour or two, for the reason that she finally came in this direction, and is at this very moment lying *perdu* somewhere within the creeks or the basins. I have no doubt that some of the daring fellows belonging to it are at this very instant within the Crystal Grotto."

How Ally started at this announcement will be readily imagined.

He looked around eagerly, not merely for a hiding-place but for an avenue of escape.

His best course seemed to be to gain the lateral gallery in which he had seen Riloff, and he stole noiselessly in that direction.

The young detective had gained this gallery unseen, when the door at the upper end of it was again opened, and Olga Riloff made her appearance.

She carried in her hand a lighted lamp, by the flame of which her face was distinctly revealed.

She was excited, eager and watchful.

Ally saw at a glance that she was a stranger to the place—an intruder like himself.

As much was shown by her actions. An instant she seemed dazed, startled, by the scene in the great central cavern, as if she had come upon it unexpectedly, and the next moment she extinguished her light.

But not till she had caught a glimpse of Ally Webber, who had been quick to make his way toward her.

"You here, Ally?" she murmured. "What is this place? Who are those men?"

"They are the torpedo gang. How came you here?"

"I followed papa—Mr. Riloff. And you?"

"I am here for the same purpose as yourself, Olga, to find out what I can—to investigate. It is here that the torpedo men have their headquarters."

"Hark!" and Olga clutched him nervously by the arm. "Do you not hear what that odious Major Becker is saying? That he believes you and other detectives are in the grotto. See! they are taking torches from the fire, and are going to search the cavern."

There was indeed a sudden and loud explosion of zeal and enthusiasm in this sense.

"Quick!" added Olga, as she threw her cloak over Ally's head and shoulders. "They have not yet seen us. We must go as I came."

She drew the young detective into the secret staircase by which she had gained the grotto, as Riloff had done before her, and closed the door behind her.

"Quick!" she repeated. "This is the secret passage between the grotto and the manor. We must have a light to see our way up the stairs."

To light a match and apply the flame to the wick of her lamp was the work of a moment.

With its first rays Ally noticed a long flight of narrow stairs—how long he could not yet see—cut at a steep incline in solid rock.

"Caution and promptness, please," enjoined Olga, in the same hurried whisper as before, as she drew his arm within her own. "Do not speak if any one sees us. You may possibly pass, in such a case, for the old housekeeper of whom I have spoken. At the very worst, you can gain the field where we first met."

She pressed forward so earnestly that the couple were soon at the head of the long flight of stairs, where they emerged through a trap-door into a large shed filled with wood and coal.

Here the girl paused, with a deep sigh of relief, relinquishing the arm of her escort, and extinguished her light again.

"You are safe now," she said, almost panting with the violence of her exertions and emotions. "Hurry away as soon as you can, and take good care never to fall into the hands of any of the men we have left behind us."

"A thousand thanks for your assistance and advice, Olga," returned Ally, "but I am not going to leave you at present."

"Not going to leave—"

"No, Olga. I want some information, and perhaps I can impart some. Take me to a place where I can exchange a few words with you."

Ere Olga could reply a light flashed upon the scene, and heavy footsteps were heard ascending the secret staircase, these sounds blending with excited voices.

"It's papa—Mr. Riloff!" gasped the girl. "Too late! Too late!"

CHAPTER IX.

NEW PLOTS AND NEW PERILS.

It was indeed too late for Ally to cross the shed, since he would have had to pass the open trap, within full view of the new-comers.

But not too late to save him!

By a quick, firm thrust, Olga pushed him into a secluded niche from which the wood had been taken, following him herself, and indicated by placing her hand over his mouth that he was to preserve the strictest silence.

These measures had scarcely been taken when Riloff emerged from the secret staircase, accompanied by Major Becker.

"Yes, we may safely leave the hunt for the invaders to Captain Madder and his men," Riloff was saying. "They're sure to be found, if they've been so audacious as to enter the Grotto. But I'm still inclined to think, with the majority of our brave fellows, that you are mistaken."

"I'm not, sir, I assure you."

"Well, we shall see."

While speaking, Riloff had touched an invisible and secret spring somewhere near at hand, and the result was to displace a large box of wood Ally had noticed, and cause it to advance in such a way as to cover the entrance of the secret staircase completely, so that no one would even have suspected its existence.

"I don't allow this route to be used a great deal, major," resumed Riloff. "Sit down, my dear fellow," and he indicated a rude bench and set the example of occupying it. "We are as retired here as we should be in my study, and I am anxious to ask you a number of questions."

Becker sat down near his chief, who continued:

"What you have said about the presence of that Ally Webber on these shores touches me more closely than you imagine. The fact is, the fellow has been here—yes, here at the manor—and has spent a whole day with me!"

"Possible!" ejaculated Becker. "With Olga, too, I suppose?" and his voice became hoarse with angry jealousy. "Curse him!"

"It's only too true," acknowledged Riloff. "It happened this way: I went to the wreck to feed those sharks we have been baiting with a view to their future usefulness, and found this young fellow in possession. He seemed all right,

and told me a romantic story—doubtless invented on the spur of the moment—of having been disappointed in love, and in this way he crept into my good graces."

"But why invite him to the manor?"

"Well, I had my reasons. Olga has fretted a great deal about what she is pleased to term your persecutions, and is getting watchful and suspicious, and I fancied that the new-comer would be an excellent suitor for her hand, since there is not the slightest chance that she will ever respond to your overtures, my dear fellow. It is needless to add that I had no suspicions. It didn't even occur to me that Harry Golos might be another name for Ally Webber. Curse him! If I ever get him into my clutches again—"

He finished with a ferocious gesture.

"Well, why don't you settle his hash this very night?" demanded Becker. "If he's not caught in the Grotto, he will of course go back to the 'Alaska' with his comrades. You know the situation of affairs there, after what I've said. The two boys have taken possession of the cabin, which is as sound as ever. They are supplied with everything, including explosives enough to blow up a town. Why not go there, between now and daylight, with two or three cans of dynamite, and clean them out so thoroughly that there won't be even a morsel left for the sharks!"

"The very thing!" cried Riloff, with a vengeful gleam in his eyes. "Do as you have suggested. I leave the matter wholly in your hands. Will you have a drink?"

"Thank you, if a bottle's handy."

Riloff arose, extending his hand to a cupboard against the wall, and taking from it a bottle, a couple of tumblers, and a box of cigars.

"I occasionally see some of our people here of late," he explained, as he placed the objects on a table conveniently near, "and have taken my measures accordingly."

Major Becker helped himself liberally and lighted a cigar, in both of which proceedings Riloff kept him company.

"And how did the young people get on?" inquired the former carelessly.

"I never saw anything like it," responded Riloff frankly. "Olga chanced to meet the chap in the fields, as he was on his way to the manor, and when they arrived they were as smiling and happy as a couple of kittens."

"Curse him!" repeated Becker, with murderous aspect and mien. "If I ever encounter him, I'll twist his neck at sight."

"Careful. You may get your own twisted." At this moment a small bell tinkled within a few feet of the couple.

"Ah, it's some one below," ejaculated Riloff. "They may have found the intruders."

He placed his lips to a speaking-tube that came readily to his hand, and demanded what was wanted.

"It's Madder," he reported, after receiving a response. "He is coming to see me by appointment. The intruders have not been found. Go, my dear fellow. I leave them in your hands. Take your three hundred pounds of dynamite and give 'em especial attention."

He conducted Becker to the entrance of the shed, bidding him good-night, and then hastened to roll away the box of wood from the entrance of the secret staircase, giving ingress to Captain Madder, whose aspect was worthy of his name.

"You have not found them, then?" greeted Riloff.

"Not the least trace," replied Madder, as he took possession, in obedience to a gesture from his chief, of the seat Becker had just vacated. "We have searched every nook of the grotto without seeing the least sign of their presence."

"Well, better luck next time," said Riloff, as he resumed his seat and shoved the bottle and a tumbler toward the new-comer, who lost no time in making use of them. "Of the main facts in the case there can be no question. Young Webber has really taken the contract of wiping us out. But I have charged Becker to blow him up with dynamite during the night, and there's no occasion, therefore, to be worried or annoyed. Be calm, my dear captain—as calm as I am."

As Riloff leaned back, disgusted, vengeful and nervous, with lowering brow, his aspect was so little suggestive of the calmness to which he laid claim that Madder could not help laughing.

This laugh restored his own good-humor, and after a second or third frowning glance Riloff joined in his merriment.

"In good truth," observed Madder, "I don't know why we should whine. The presence of that boy is of no particular consequence, particularly if our nautical allies at the wreck should find a chance to interview him. The new boat is doubtless much superior to ours, but we can capture her or destroy her. As to all other matters, I believe they are all flourishing—with one solitary exception."

And Captain Madder sighed as dismally as if he had been surveying his coffin.

"That one, I suppose—"

"Yes, that one is my suit for the hand of

your daughter, sir," avowed Madder. "The last time I did myself the honor of proposing for her hand, she convinced me that I am not likely to be accepted as a suitor."

"How convinced you?"

"Why, she said if she had the choice of marrying me, or being eaten up by a shark, she'd choose the latter."

"Well, she likes you just as well as she likes Becker," said Riloff. "Neither of you will have the least chance until you've got rid of Webber. But all this is foreign to business. What is the news from Baltimore?"

"The best in the world, sir," replied Madder, as he sipped his whisky appreciatively. "Weatherbee has not given up the search for his missing wife, but he has ceased to hope for favorable results, and looks like a man ready to tumble into the grave. You couldn't believe it without seeing it—how much he has changed during these three months."

"Good!" breathed Riloff sibilantly, rubbing his hands together in the wildest delight. "The more he suffers the better. But, what about that missing chief of police?"

"Colonel Broadwell? Oh, there is so little said about him—he has dropped out of sight so completely—that I had to think twice to recall him. He's regarded as dead. There have been suggestions, in fact, against him. One paper squibbed him as a defaulter and fugitive."

"That, too, is as it should be," commented Riloff, with leering eyes and features, as he continued to rub his hands together. "I shall never forget the services you have rendered me and are rendering, Madder. But what about the business affairs of Weatherbee? Has he ceased to give them attention?"

"To the contrary, he is more active than ever, as if business were the only solace of his grief. His new ship, the Maryland, has been loaded with a full cargo, and will be down the bay in the course of to-morrow."

"Indeed?" and Riloff started, almost holding his breath, in his eagerness. "The Maryland, too, must be intercepted. She must be sent to the bottom."

"She shall be!" cried Madder. "But how?"

He placed his tumbler on the table, with the air of having no further use for it, and gave himself up to a profound mental interrogatory. Riloff watched him in silence, occasionally drawing his cigar, nervously.

"I have it," finally said Madder, in a barely audible whisper. "I'll take a small, swift sloop, and send her out into the bay to watch for the Maryland. Let the clipper appear when she will, the sloop will always be in a position to place herself in the ship's path, and she can be handled in such a way that a collision will be inevitable. The dynamite can be so set with the time fuse that it will be exploded at the moment of the collision, and at the same time allow the crew of the sloop to make good their escape."

"Capital!" exclaimed Riloff. "Ten to one not a man will escape. Ten to one the Maryland will simply be reported missing, as was the case with the Essex. Make all your arrangements, cap'n, as soon as you can. I leave the matter entirely in your hands."

"I'll not be found wanting," returned Madder, as he arose. "All the necessary measures'll be taken between now and daylight. I'll look in upon you at the last moment before the deed's done, to see if there's any need of modifying plans. Until then, good luck."

And Madder shook the hand offered him, and took his departure.

For a moment Riloff looked after his associate with a strangely fixed gaze, as if asking himself whether anything had been left unsaid; then he replaced the box of wood over the secret staircase and threw the apparatus out of order—so that the secret entrance could not readily be reached by strangers—and turned and left the shed, gliding swiftly away toward the entrance of his dwelling, scarcely more than a hundred yards distant.

"Now to look after her!" he muttered. "Ah, Hiram Weatherbee! Hiram Weatherbee! Y'er hair'd be whiter'n 'tis if ye knew how near your lambs are to the wolf!"

CHAPTER X.

IN RADIANCE AND SHADOW!

FOR a few moments after the withdrawal of Riloff, Ally and Olga remained motionless.

They were not merely apprehensive that an enemy might still be close at hand, but they were deeply under the spell of wonder and horror caused by the revelations which had come to their hearing.

"And this is our Russian exile!" exclaimed Olga, with withering scorn, as she emerged from her concealment. "If I had not heard of these infamies with my own ears, I could not have believed them possible. Even now I seem to be the sport of some horrible illusion. Let us get out of this place."

She led the way toward the door of the shed, superb in life and vigor, and with a strange joy in her manner and an unwonted hope and content in her eyes.

"How glad I am that Riloff is not my father!" she added, as she reached the open air, after sending a long and sweeping glance in every direction. "This truth has come out since I saw you, Ally!"

"How come out?" and he offered his arm, which the girl accepted, leaning confidently upon it.

"In a conversation between Riloff and his housekeeper, which I happened to overhear without any intention to that effect," explained the maiden. "It even came out that Riloff is not the real name of that man!"

"Indeed!" commented Ally. "I am delighted to hear that you have made these discoveries. They are more important, as well as more timely, than you know! You did not actually learn what the real name is, I suppose?"

"No. But who is this Mr. Weatherbee of whom they were speaking?"

"He is my employer—the great ship-owner of Baltimore. Would you like to see his photograph?"

"I would indeed—after what I have heard of the villainy of which he is the object."

"Here it is."

They had reached a rustic retreat they had more than once occupied during the first long day of their acquaintance, and Ally assisted her to a comfortable seat, placing himself by her side and producing his bull's-eye.

"We are so inclosed by trees and flowering shrubs that we shall not be disturbed here," he added, as he flashed a vivid light upon the photograph. "I am quite sure there is no one near us."

"So that is Mr. Weatherbee?" murmured Olga, as her eyes settled upon the picture. "What a noble-looking, handsome man he is!"

Then a sort of startled look appeared in her eyes and on her features, and she added:

"Somehow this face is familiar! Where can I have seen it before?"

She seemed to be searching her memory, while Ally scanned her countenance with a singular intenceness.

"Not here—at Riloff's?" he suggested.

"Oh, dear—no! But far back in the past! This picture seems like an echo of memory!" and she continued to stare upon it as if fascinated. "But what is the story about Mrs. Weatherbee?"

"Briefly, she was abducted from her home three months ago by some unknown man who announced himself as a clergyman and said that his name was Turner," answered Ally. "I have her photo, too. Would you like to see it?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

Ally produced it, taking care to present it in the best and clearest light possible.

At sight of it a startled cry of wondering recognition escaped the girl's lips.

"Oh, Ally!" she murmured.

"You have met her? you have seen her?" cried the young detective, excitedly, as he scanned every movement of her agitated features.

"No, no! And yet—how strange! It seems as if I had known her all my life! Oh, let me think, Ally!"

She pressed the photograph to her lips, and closed her eyes, seeming to look far down into the depths of her soul!

"It must be—it must be!" she murmured, as she opened her eyes, into which a flood of tender tears had welled. "All my life I have been haunted by vague memories of another home than this—of other surroundings—of being in loving arms—of receiving loving caresses! And, oh, Ally! I have dreamed all my life of such a mother as this lady! This face brings back to me as a reality the memory by which I have so long been haunted! Where is she? Where is she?"

"That is a question Mr. Hiram Weatherbee would gladly give his whole fortune to have answered."

"No one knows then? Who is the terrible miscreant who is supposed to have carried her off?"

"Suspicion points to a man who was once known as Abner Radwill," declared Ally. "But where Abner Radwill is, that is a question which has not yet been answered."

"Then no one knows, of course, where this poor lady is, Ally," said Olga, as she pressed the photograph tenderly to her lips again and again. "Did she have a daughter?"

"And what became of her?"

"She is supposed to have been drowned in the bay when not far from two years of age," declared Ally.

"Supposed? Was she not drowned?"

"Probably not, Olga. It is now thought that she was abducted by this same deadly enemy—the Abner Radwill of whom I have spoken."

"Then no one knows where she is either?"

"No, Olga."

"What horrible mysteries! What agony Mr. Weatherbee must endure at the thought that both his wife and daughter are in the hands of such a deadly villain! May I keep these pictures?"

"Most assuredly—if such is your wish."

Kissing them again and again, Olga secured the pictures in her bosom, while Ally extinguished his bull's-eye.

"But I must ask a favor in return," he said; "one photograph in exchange for these two. That is to say, I must ask you for a photograph of yourself, dear Olga. I suppose you have had copies taken?"

"Oh, yes—repeatedly, as what young girl has not? I will give you copies of the latest—the one I had taken last summer. But you must wait for it until I see you again, and when and where that will be, Ally, I cannot even imagine."

"Oh, you may leave the ways and means to me, Olga," assured Ally, as he took the girl's hand in his own and held it with a tell-tale tenderness. "If you will remember to put the photos in your pocket when you return to the house, I will soon find means of calling upon you for them. I should like two or three copies."

"Why so many?"

"Because I wish to send one to my friend, Mr. Weatherbee."

"Would he care for it?"

"More than you would think, perhaps. In fact, he may be as much interested in your picture as you are in his and in Mrs. Weatherbee's. What would be more natural? In any case, as I am making a daily report to him of all my doings and discoveries, it is only fair to send him the picture of the little lady who has stolen my heart."

"Oh, Ally! What a bold, good, wicked, strange young man you are. Perhaps I ought to fly from you as if my life were in danger!"

"Indeed? What have I done that you should shun me?"

"True. But I should have certainly fled if you had not come. You heard what was said by Becker and Madder? I am almost afraid of those men."

"They have not threatened you?"

"Only by their wicked glances. They are both angry because I have rejected them."

"Perhaps they may yet seek to be revenged upon you," suggested Ally, as his face suddenly grew stern and grave. "Could you depend upon Mrs. Arbuckle to befriend you, the necessity arising?"

"Just about as much as a lamb could depend upon a wolf!" answered Olga, unreservedly.

"She is a very wicked woman, Ally. I cannot tell you now all I overheard between her and Mr. Riloff. It is enough to say that she has a hold upon him, and that she is trying to force him to marry her!"

"Indeed! This is important, Olga. But it seems that you have not a single friend at the manor—not a single servant upon whom you can depend in the hour of trouble."

"True, but you are in even more dangerous surroundings. You noticed what Riloff said to Becker? They intend to blow up the Alaska in the course of the night, and the Maryland tomorrow—"

"I noted those points, and you may be sure that I shall not be blown up with either vessel, whatever else may happen," and Ally smiled upon her through the moonlight as bravely as tenderly. "How fortunate it is that we have such good friends in each other. I have no doubt of being able to win a victory for both you and myself, Olga, despite all these people may do to our detriment."

"How brave you are, Ally," murmured Olga. "What comfort you give me! I live a new life since you came. It seems as if I had known you for weeks and months, instead of a few short hours. I am just a little afraid that you will think me too frank or too presuming—"

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you."

"Or that you will regard me as a great trouble and bother—"

"No more of that, Olga," and the young detective pressed to his lips the plump hand he held. "You are just the dearest and best little girl in the world. I shudder at the thought of having lived so long without knowing you."

"And I—at the thought of what would be my situation at this moment if you had not come," and the gentle eyes filled again. "Oh, Ally! will—the hour ever come when I shall not have you to lean upon?"

"Never, dear Olga—at least while my soul inhabits my body. Henceforth I live only for your sake, and for the sake of those so near to you—those who have been so cruelly wronged. Only to restore you to the hearts which have so long been sorrowing over your absence. Good-night, dear Olga. Be watchful and guarded. Should darkness and sorrow descend upon you, do not forget the Great Hand of which we have spoken, and do not doubt that it will again bring us together—in this life, I do not doubt, and most assuredly in that better life which is to come."

A single moment he hovered above her, framing her lovely face in his hands, and bestowing his first rapturous kisses upon it, and the next instant he had traversed the encircling bushes and vanished.

Bold and good she had called him, and it is evident enough that she was not mistaken.

CHAPTER XI.

BUSINESS GETTING LIVELY.

THANKS to the precautions he had taken—that of having a fire under his boiler, and that of having a number of air-chambers filled with water—the escape of Captain Drake and his companions from the Crystal Grotto had been readily effected.

By the time the worthy captain had secured the hatch in its place, several additional air-chambers had been filled, and the Water Witch began to descend gently to the bottom.

At the same time the screw was put in motion, and the boat began moving out of the inner basin.

She had barely reached its entrance, however, still showing no light, when a brilliant glare burst upon the gaze of the steerer, and he beheld the Little Tiger approaching, scarcely a dozen rods away.

He hardly had time to place the Water Witch out of harm's way, at one side of the outer basin, and bring her to a halt, when the boat of the outlaws arrived at the entrance of the inner basin, and passed on to her destination.

Another moment, and the daring intruders were making good their retreat, leaving the Crystal Grotto behind them.

"Another escape from discovery," muttered Drake, with a long breath of relief. "But a miss is as good as a mile."

He did not speak again until the boat was alongside the Alaska.

"We'll simply wait here until Webber arrives," he then said, as he drew off the hatch.

"We'll hold ourselves in readiness for action, passing the time as comfortably as possible."

The wait that followed proved a long one, and even Captain Drake had begun to grow anxious, when there suddenly came a hail from the shore, bringing all the watchers to their feet.

"It's Ally," cried Mark Sherman. "He wants us to come for him."

He was not long in responding to this demand, and the young detective soon stood in their midst, as much to their joy as to their relief.

"You found a way out, then?" greeted Drake.

"Yes, thanks to Miss Riloff; and I've learned more than my wildest anticipations promised," declared Ally. "But not a moment is to be lost in transferring all our effects from the Alaska to the new boat. We're in deadly peril here. The torpedo men are coming to blow up the wreck!"

The words produced a profound sensation.

"But surely we can defend ourselves," said Mark.

"The best defense is a timely retreat," continued Ally. "I have ample ideas for our installation elsewhere. We'll let the rascals think they've wiped us out, while we weave a pretty web for them nearer their den."

Drake chuckled grimly.

"An excellent plan," he commented.

The transfer was duly made.

"Doubtless they'll come in an ordinary row-boat, so as not to jeopardize in any way their submarine craft," suggested Ally.

He looked at his watch and continued:

"It's hardly time for them yet, but we may as well move out of harm's way and select a new hiding-place. Is there not plenty of water at the base of that promontory to the north of us? Look at the chart, as we have no time for special soundings."

The chart was duly examined.

"Yes, that's the place for us," decided Ally. "Take the boat to this spot, captain."

The order was obeyed.

"We need not sink her?" then asked Drake.

"No. Put her three-fourths under and keep ready for instant movement."

The desired dispositions were leisurely made, and Ally and Drake extended themselves at full length in the tall grass in the midst of some trees covering the promontory in question.

"The point is not merely a wall of rock between us and Becker," observed Ally, "but it hides us completely. How fortunate!"

"And especially how timely!" returned Drake in a guarded whisper, as he looked through a night-glass he had adjusted to his eye. "See! they are coming!"

Ally hastened to verify the assertion.

A dark speck had indeed appeared on the surface of the water, well inshore, to the southward of the wreck, and this speck was drawing nearer in silence.

It was soon made out to be a small boat with only two men.

Continuing to advance, the couple were soon abreast of the wreck, and between it and the shore, and here they rested upon their oars with the air of watching and listening.

"They see our skiff," whispered Ally, "and so take it for granted that we are on the wreck!"

"Yes—and so they row nearer!"

Moving noiselessly, the boat passed under the stern of the Alaska and disappeared in the fold.

"They have satisfied themselves that we are asleep," said Ally, "and are going to place their dynamite, boat and all, under the cabin floor!"

"Can they do this?"
 "Yes; especially at this state of the tide."
 An interval of several minutes succeeded.
 "What can they be doing?" then asked Drake.

"Oh, it's a task to get the boat into the desired position," returned Ally. "Possibly the water may be too high—"

"No; there they come!"

The two men had appeared on the deck of the Alaska, their forms clearly visible in the moonlight.

Crossing the deck rapidly, they descended the hamper of the mizzen-mast, gained the skiff in which the young detectives had arrived at the wreck, severed with a single stroke of a knife the rope which attached it to the ship and rowed as rapidly as possible to the nearest beach.

The watchers understood these movements.

The couple having placed their explosives in a desirable position, had left to a time-fuse the task of executing their purpose.

They did not halt an instant on the beach, but ran nimbly away to the nearest shelter afforded by the configuration of the coast, which proved to be the high bank of a small stream descending from the adjacent hills to the bay.

"Ah! they're not alone," whispered Drake, as he followed their movements with a glass. "A considerable body of the torpedo men, a dozen at least, have come along the beach to witness—"

There was no time to add "the explosion."

It took place at this moment.

It was as if the earth had opened!

A roar, which was simply indescribable, rent the air, into which ascended a fiery flood, and a gust like the spur of a hurricane swept over the whole shore.

And then there was a tremendous shower far and near of dark and fiery objects, which promptly died out in an intense blackness, the scene becoming strangely still.

"It's well we were not there," said Drake.

"They meant to make sure work of it!"

A chorus of joyous voices succeeded, and Becker and several of his companions were seen hastening to the skiff.

Jumping into it, they rowed off to the scene of the explosion.

"Look, boys!" cried a voice, which Ally recognized as that of Becker himself. "What a clean sweep!"

The entire deck of the Alaska had not merely been blown away, as had every stick and timber pertaining to the cabin, but the mighty hull itself had been torn into a score of huge pieces, which had been scattered around in every direction.

The rejoicings of the torpedo men were so loud that the watchers readily overheard them.

"There's not a sign of them left," said one.

"Not enough to bait a hook," said another.

"We're rid of them forever," cried a third.

It was several minutes before the excitement of the torpedo men had subsided sufficiently to permit them to retire from the scene of their supposed triumph.

"A deluded lot," commented Drake, as he took a last glance at the retreating figures. "You see, boys, how easy it is to be mistaken. While those men retire in the firm conviction that there is not enough of us left for fish-bait, we were never quite so lively and dangerous as we are at this moment!"

He led the way aboard of the Water Witch, and was quickly followed by those of the crew who had slipped out to see the explosion.

"And now to dispose of ourselves for the balance of the night," proposed the captain, with a yawn which would have seemed to the "untutored mind" to threaten the dislocation of his jaws. "Shall we stay here till morning, Mr. Webber?"

"Yes—with a man on the lookout."

A guard and relief having been duly appointed, all the rest turned in.

A sound sleep of four to five hours gave Ally the renovation he needed, and he gained his feet quietly, sending a glance of inquiry around.

As he could readily see through the hatchway, another beautiful day was at hand.

A stir near him told him Drake was awake.

"Had enough of it?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir, on the principle that 'enough's as good as a feast.' Going to take another turn?"

"A turn-out only," answered Drake, suiting his action to the word and proceeding to make his toilet. "You haven't detailed your discoveries, but I suppose we ought to be moving."

"Quite right, captain. If you'll get under way—below the surface, this time—and lay your course out into the bay, I'll tell you what work has been cut out for us. It's a question of saving the Maryland from these villains."

Drake hastened to give the necessary orders, and by the time he and Ally had completed their toilets the Water Witch had "dived again"—to use a phrase which had begun to be current—and was steaming out into the bay two or three fathoms below the surface.

"The Maryland, my boy?" then said Drake, dropping into a seat beside our hero.

Ally gave him the details of the ship's peril, adding

"What we have to do, you see, is to put Captain Cotter on his guard."

"Exactly," returned Drake. "If she sailed last evening, she ought to be visible an hour hence, particularly if we stand away northward to meet her," said Drake.

"Which please do," suggested Ally. "Mean-time," and he yawned, "I'll take an hour's nap, as I find myself less rested than I supposed."

The captain nodded understandingly, looking at his watch, and ordered the engineer to give the boat a little more speed, at the same time that he directed the substitution of a stronger electric light for the one already in use.

"Of course there is plenty of water hereabouts and no rocks," he said to Becker, as he returned to his charts, "but there is occasionally a wreck floating about, and it will be well not to relax our vigilance."

At the end of an hour, during which the boat continued to make rapid progress, the captain touched Ally's arm, arousing him.

"We're coming to the surface," he announced. "I'll have the latch off by the time your eyes are fairly open."

Ally gained his feet, seized the best glass at his disposal, and hastened to look out.

No clipper was visible.

As to the manor of Riloff, it had been left out of sight.

For a moment Ally was disappointed, but a few reflections restored his equanimity.

"It is still early," he said, turning to Drake.

"Reduce your speed one-half, and we'll go on as we're going."

"On the surface, you mean?"

"Yes. But keep a sharp lookout, so as to 'dive' in case of need."

This programme had been in rigor scarcely a quarter of an hour, when Drake, who had been scanning the northern horizon intently, suddenly uttered an exclamation of joyous excitement:

"At last!" he cried. "There's a clipper dead ahead. It can only be the Maryland."

We need not detail how joyfully Ally continued his progress, in due course meeting the clipper.

"I have a message for you, Captain Cotter," cried Ally, as he came within hailing distance.

"Heave to and I'll come aboard."

No time was lost in complying.

Laying the Water Witch alongside, Ally seized the rope-ladder which had been lowered to him, and hastily ascended to the deck.

"What is it, my boy?" asked Cotter, who was a fine specimen of the American merchant commander, and stood high in Mr. Weatherbee's confidence—quite enough to have a general idea of what Ally was doing.

"Simply this," replied Ally, drawing the captain aside, "that an effort is to be made to send you to the bottom."

"Ah! another torpedo—"

"Not this time—no, sir. They're sharpened enough not to send the same pitcher to the well too often," explained Ally. "An hour or two hence, more or less, as you are sailing down the bay, you'll see a small sloop or other craft which will be handled in such a way as to intercept you."

"And what then?"

"Why, you'll have your boats in readiness, with four men armed to the teeth, and at the desired moment you'll lower your boats and surround the intrusive stranger, when you'll find that she's loaded with dynamite enough to do even more for the Maryland than that torpedo of three months ago did for the Alaska."

"Sail ho!" cried a lookout. "Dead ahead!"

"That is the craft I am speaking of, no doubt, Captain Cotter," added Ally. "You know the old proverb, 'Forewarned is forearmed.' I will return to my boat and sink out of sight behind the Maryland, as I do not wish to be seen by the new-comer. You left Mr. Weatherbee well?"

"Yes, Webber, and he charged me to say that his terrible enemy is somewhere in this neighborhood. He also gave me this letter for you."

"Many thanks, captain. It is quite true that this is the haunt of the torpedo men. I have already been in their stronghold, and have already dispatched special details of my discoveries to Mr. Weatherbee. Good-morning, captain, and a prosperous voyage."

And with this Ally shook hands with Captain Cotter, and nimbly descended the rope-ladder.

"A strange craft you have there, Mr. Webber," the commander could not help saying, as he leaned over the side. "It's Podder's latest?"

Our hero assented.

"I shall expect to hear a good report of her," pursued Cotter. "In the mean time, a thousand thanks for the hint you have given me. It shall have my best attention."

He waited until the young detective had cast off, and then resumed his course, exchanging final salutations.

"A queer business," muttered Cotter, in the ear of his executive, after a long look on the sail which had been reported. "See if you can make her out, Mr. Samson."

It was a long, very long time before Mr. Samson, who was renowned alike for his slowness and sureness, would hazard an opinion.

"She's a small sloop, sir," he then declared.

"But what is she doing?"

Another long scrutiny and another long silence.

"She's trying to foul us, sir, without having the air o' doing it!"

Captain Cotter smiled.

"The very thing," he muttered. "Now, Mr. Samson, that sloop is full of dynamite. She intends to blow us to pieces. Get a couple of boats ready, and arm your men with revolvers as well as sabers. When the cutter has arrived within fifty rods, drop your boats and go for her, seizing her and every man aboard of her."

The necessary measures were all quickly taken, and the clipper and sloop continued to near each other.

CHAPTER XII.

ALLY'S NEW HEADQUARTERS.

IT WAS with an intense satisfaction that Ally gazed after the Maryland, as the clipper stood away rapidly on her course.

"Captain Cotter is sure to turn the tables on Madder," he remarked, "and to give the necessary attention to our own future. We have no Alaska to go to, and I think it will be better to take up our abode at about this distance from Riloff's. But where?"

"There is no island hereabouts, I suppose?" suggested Mark.

"No, and the eastern shore is too far away to be available. But I think we shall find what we want on this Virginia coast just abreast of us."

"No doubt of it," returned Drake, "if we may judge of those bold promontories and headlands. Why not steer in that direction?"

"The very thing to do, sir."

The orders to this effect were given.

"We really must have a footing somewhere on the coast," resumed Ally. "We need it for coals, and even for our provisions, not to mention that we must have a deep creek, easily accessible, in which to hide our boat."

Seating himself beside Captain Drake, he began to scan the charts of the shore and bay earnestly.

"There's a creek here, it seems," pursued the young detective, indicating a certain point on the chart, "and it not only has a good depth of water, but is overlooked by a considerable bluff. Upon the crest of this bluff, as is shown by the chart, there is a 'farm-house.' What may be the actual nature of the place remains to be seen. The spot may be occupied by some lone hermit, or it may be the abode of a wealthy proprietor, like Riloff. Ah, the farm is called 'Foreland Manor,' and the arm of the sea bears the classic name of Clam Creek. We'll visit the spot, and if it responds to our requirements, I'll rent it or buy it."

The boat was steered accordingly.

In the course of half an hour it was possible to make out Foreland Manor with considerable distinctness.

"It's really quite a building," said Ally, after a long look through his glass. "Not quite so elaborate as Riloff's place, but it would nevertheless be easy for a stranger to mistake one for the other. I believe we shall find there just what we need."

The explorers were gratified to see, as they neared the coast that there seemed very little life or movement upon it.

At last they entered the creek, and drew alongside a rude pier, half wood and half stone, which seemed to be the landing-place for Foreland Manor.

"Mark and I will go and investigate," said Ally, as he prepared to land. "The rest had better remain with you, Captain Drake, and maintain a strict lookout."

Looking to their arms, the young detectives gained the shore and took their way up a well-worn path which led to the crest of the slope.

For the first hundred rods the route was sufficiently shaded by bushes and obstructed by rocks and ravines, but it nevertheless continued to give every sign of having been long and extensively in use.

"I think some one is coming to meet us," suddenly said Mark, as he caught a glimpse of a human figure through the intervals of the leaves and bushes at no great distance.

"Perhaps the proprietor."

"We need not count upon a warm welcome if his pace is an index of his mood," observed Ally, a few moments later. "He seems really disgusted and annoyed at sight of us."

The countenance of the man who was descending the path to meet the couple was in no way slandered by these observations.

It was dark, moody and suspicious.

The body to which it belonged was sufficiently active and formidable.

The age of the new-comer was not far from fifty years.

There was a huge dog at his heels, a cross between a bull-dog and a Newfoundland, but the creature did not deign to bark at the intruders or take the least notice of their presence.

"I saw you coming, gentlemen," said the stranger, with a careless salute, "and thought I'd spare you the trouble of climbing as far as the house. 'What can I do for you?'"

"Are you the proprietor of Foreland Manor, sir?" asked Ally.

"Yes, I'm sorry to say."

"Then it is you that I am looking for."

The man became more uneasy at this assurance, looking more crabbed than ever.

"For—for me?" he muttered.

"Yes, sir. I have come here to buy your place, if you are willing to sell it."

The stranger looked bewildered a moment as if he could not quite confide in his hearing, and then his face beamed as vividly as suddenly.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"Perfectly," answered Ally.

The stranger looked from one to the other.

"That is rather a queer boat of yours, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes, rather," assented Ally.

"Seems to me a sort of floating sausage," pursued the stranger. "Can it be that you are—that you belong—in fact, that you are—"

The young detective interrupted him with a reassuring smile.

"No, we are not members of the fraternity to which you allude," he declared. "On the contrary, we are quite the reverse!"

The stranger drew a long breath of relief, as much at the frank and honest countenance of our hero as at his declaration.

"I am glad to hear it," he said. "But if you are honest and in possession of a fair amount of common sense, what can you want of a place like Foreland Manor?"

"We can tell you that later, perhaps," replied Ally, "although it is hardly pertinent to the subject. Am I right in concluding from one or two of your remarks that you would like to sell the place?"

"You were never more right, young man," declared the proprietor of Foreland Manor, emphatically. "What do you know about the property?"

"Only what the inscription of its name on a sea-chart has told me, in addition to limited views of it from the bay."

"You have not even been over it?"

"No, sir."

"Then come with me."

The proprietor wheeled on his heels, leading the way in the direction of the house.

The young detectives hastened to follow him. "My name's Brattle," he resumed. "I have been here a number of years. The house was built—the spot first settled, indeed—by a Colonel Burnham, who was the most famous smuggler that has ever been seen in the Old Dominion!"

"Burnham?" repeated Ally, looking about curiously. "I recall the name. This was his place, then?"

"Yes; until the revenue people smoked him out."

"Let's see; Mr. Brattle, what became of the colonel?"

"He was killed by a fall from the cliff while endeavoring to escape from the officers who were looking for him," explained Brattle. "The place changed hands once or twice and then came to mine. I was neither a smuggler nor a torpedo crook nor anything else especially disagreeable, so far as I know. I had simply become disgusted with society by reason of the gossip which had followed a number of family misfortunes, and I came here for peace and quietude."

"And how has the place responded to your expectations, sir?" asked Mark.

"About as everything responds to our hopes in this world, young man," declared Brattle, with fierce frankness, as he gave utterance to a deep sigh. "I have had about as much peace as a dog on a treadmill. I will say little of the wrecks which have taken place near me, for these are sacrifices to humanity, but it is no pleasant sight to have a score of dead bodies in your house—as I had on one occasion—awaiting burial. One great annoyance has been a constant succession of rough sailors, who take it for granted that I am Colonel Burnham, or at least his successor in business, and who desire to offer me their services. Where all these chaps can come from is beyond comprehension. Only day before yesterday, after a two days' trip to Richmond, I found that no less than seven rugged waifs had accumulated here to offer me their services as smugglers, and I could not get rid of them till the following morning."

The young detectives expressed their sympathy in polite terms, but they were none the less attentive to the amusing aspects of the situation.

"It is needless to add," pursued Brattle, "that where there has been such a run of smugglers, actual or prospective, there has also been a run of revenue officers. Hardly a day passes that I am not waited upon by some official, and forced to declare, for the thousandth time, the whole history and mystery of my residence here and the business which occupies my attention. But that is not the worst of it. Since old Buloff, or Ruloff—whatever his name is—took up his residence on the coast, I am subject to almost daily intrusion either by people who desire a job at his hands, or by some one who is sent to find out his secrets."

The visitors exchanged glances.

What seemed to Brattle a hardship seemed to them an attraction.

"Add to all these drawbacks the fact that it begins to be rumored that the infernal torpedo gang has its den somewhere on this coast," concluded Brattle, "and you will comprehend that life at Foreland Manor is not exactly modeled after that of the first pair in the Garden of Eden."

"And yet you seem to have a pleasant place," said Ally, as he looked about appreciatively. "You have cultivated numerous fields, and seeded down to grass numerous others. Your cattle and horses look fine, and the same may be said of your sheep and other stock."

"Oh, yes—a man can live here, if he's not too particular," declared Brattle. "You really like the place?"

"Yes, sir. The air is charming, the view excellent, the site commanding, and the place is accessible by sea or land. The house itself seems to be a good one. If my first impressions are confirmed, I shall be glad to arrange for immediate possession."

Brattle seemed to experience a foretaste of everlasting bliss at the assurance.

"You seem to know what you are about, young man," he said, "and I've not heard of any recent escapes from the lunatic asylums of Virginia and the adjacent States. Evidently I am not called upon by any human or divine law to say any more about the drawbacks of the property. It would please me to make an instant transfer of everything, even to my housekeeper and laborers—in a word, to step out, and let you step in."

"That will also please me, sir," said Ally. "It only remains to see the property and come to terms."

The trio went over the house, and then walked across the fields and pastures, eventually arriving at the highest point of the cliffs overlooking the bay.

In the course of the survey, Ally exchanged a few words with the housekeeper, and also with a grizzled old fellow named Runnel, who was presented to him as the general factotum of the premises.

The master took especial care to mention that Runnel had been one of the smugglers of Colonel Burnham, but at the same time he gave the fellow the best of characters, intimating that he was just the man to be of service to the newcomers, as he was intimately acquainted with the whole coast.

In the course of half an hour all the terms had been agreed upon, and Ally had received a deed of the place, in exchange for a draft on his Washington banker.

The servants and tenants on the estate were summoned, and the young detective was presented to them as their future employer and landlord.

Simply remarking that he had no intention of making any changes in the household, and that he would take an early occasion of cultivating their acquaintance, Ally dismissed them.

"As to me," said Brattle, as soon as he was again alone with his new friends, "I will take my boat up the river to Horton's Landing, and from there will take the steamboat to Baltimore. If I leave immediately," he added, with a bustling air, "I shall be just in time to make connections."

Ally saw him off, politely, and then he and Mark returned to Captain Drake.

"Good-luck, then?" he queried, as he surveyed their beaming faces.

"As usual, captain."

"You have taken possession?"

"Yes. I have even bought the place, and under such conditions that an honest penny can be turned whenever we care to sell it."

"Bravo!" cried Drake. "We, too, are in luck. Come and see what a nice hiding-place we have found for the boat."

He led the way to the spot, and Ally was much pleased to find his boat stowed away in a nook of the creek so snugly that any one might have passed within a rod of it without detecting its presence.

"We are indeed well fixed here," was his comment. "But come, one and all. I am anxious to show you the house and the grounds."

He led the way up the slope.

"One beauty of the place is that we can see so far in every direction," observed the new proprietor, "and another is that Clam Creek bends around and behind the estate in such a way as to offer a considerable barrier to intrusion from that quarter. What we'll all do first is to have dinner, and we'll then get out under the trees and spend the day in well-earned recreation."

The young detective entered upon this programme with such good spirits and good fellowship, that it was not an hour before the newcomers all felt as much at home at the Foreland Manor as if they had been there a month.

With the approach of night Captain Drake and several of his men returned to the Water Witch, while the rest of the crew remained at the house with Ally and Mark.

As evening came on, Ally had a somewhat

lengthy and confidential communication with Mrs. Gussett, the housekeeper, who seemed to him very motherly, devoted and kind.

"Without going into needless details, Mrs. Gussett," he finally remarked, "I may mention that we have incurred the enmity of the torpedo men of whom we were speaking at dinner, and it would not be at all strange if some of those ruffians should come here to make us trouble. To prevent such an intrusion, I propose to watch all night."

"No necessity of that, sir," returned Mrs. Gussett. "Fido and I can do all the watching."

"Fido? Mr. Brattle's dog?"

"Yes, sir—the big dog you've seen. As you may have noticed, I offered to care for him until his master's return, and he's now asleep in his kennel."

"Perhaps that's the best place for him!" returned Ally, sarcastically. "I saw him this morning, and he seemed to me about as dangerous as a sheep. He did not even bark at us."

"Fido's not a barking dog," explained Mrs. Gussett, "but he's as dangerous as a tiger. He'll wake up in an hour or two, and from that time until daylight will take as good care of the place as if he owned it."

This praise had such an effect upon Ally and his friends, that they did not hesitate to go to bed, the more especially as Mrs. Gussett announced herself as a "light sleeper."

Fatigued with all the cares and toils of several days preceding, the young detective was soon asleep.

How long he had slept he had no instant means of knowing, but he was suddenly awakened by a tremendous uproar, prominent in which were the fierce growls of a dog.

"Ah, what's that?" he demanded, as he gained his feet by a movement which a drill-sergeant would have characterized as one time and one motion. "That sounds like the renowned Fido! What can have happened?"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DARING EXPEDITION.

THE young detective had lain down half-dressed, as was his practice, and in a moment he was at the door, whence he passed out upon the lawn, hastening toward the scene of disturbance.

The growls of Fido suddenly ceased, but not before Ally had detected the presence of Mrs. Gussett.

He also caught the outlines of a horse and wagon, with a feminine figure in the act of descending from the vehicle.

"What's the trouble, Mrs. Gussett?" he demanded.

"Here's a colored woman who has missed her way," answered Mrs. Gussett, "and asks to be allowed to stay here till morning."

"Well, why not? Here comes Runnel to take charge of the horse, and I suppose you can make the woman comfortable?"

At the sound of his voice the new-comer had started violently, and she now advanced nearer, scanning his features by a bull's-eye in the hand of Mark Sherman, who was just in the act of arriving.

"Are you the proprietor here, sir?" she asked, with a keen glance toward the distant road.

Mark assented.

"And—and Mr. Brattle?"

"I've bought him out, and he has gone."

"Ah, I know you now, Mr. Golos," she continued. "I've seen you at Riloff's."

"Indeed," and Ally started. "Then who are you?"

"I am not what I seem," and the new-comer stepped to a watering-trough near the corner of the house and began washing her face vigorously. "Wait a moment Mr. Golos, and I will tell you more."

Runnel had led the horse away to the stable, and Mrs. Gussett had secured Fido in the kitchen, when the new-comer came back to our hero, her face showing strangely white in the rays of Mark's bull's-eye.

"What! you are a white woman?" cried Ally, in undisguised astonishment.

"As you see, Mr. Golos. Don't you know me?"

"Yes, madam. You are Mrs. Arbuckle, Mr. Riloff's housekeeper."

Such was indeed the fact.

"Permit me to add, madam," pursued Ally, "that I, too, have been masquerading. My name is not Harry Golos, but Ally Webber. I am a detective, and have established myself here to further my views of investigating the man who calls himself Riloff."

"Ah! how fortunate!" ejaculated the woman, with a long sigh of relief. "I am delighted to know you in your true character, Mr. Webber. I have fled for my life from Riloff's. He would have killed me before morning if I had not blackened my face and fled. But of all this later."

"How did you leave Olga?" asked Ally.

"She is well, but strangely sad and silent. She asked me toward night if I had seen you during the day."

"Is she in any danger at the hands of Riloff—or otherwise?" pursued Ally.

"No, sir—not so far as I know."

"Is there a lady shut up in the manor to your knowledge, Mrs. Arbuckle?"

"What a strange question! No, sir—not to my knowledge. And yet—it is possible. Certain things I've seen—certain remarks I've heard—would tend to show that he has a lady prisoner somewhere."

Ally turned to his housekeeper.

"I know this lady, Mrs. Gussett," he said. "Please show her to a room, and make her as comfortable as possible. Good-night, madam. We'll exchange ideas further in the morning."

He looked after Mrs. Gussett and her guest until they had disappeared into the house, and then turned to Mark, at the same time noting the time.

"This little episode confirms me in a half-formed resolution, Mark," he declared. "It is not late, and the distance to Riloff's is not far. I believe it is possible to make a success of the project I have so often proposed to you—that of paying a secret visit to Riloff's. Why shouldn't we carry out this project this very night?"

"It is for you to decide, Ally," returned Mark. "You know I am quite at your disposal, whenever you have come to any decision."

"Well, here comes Runnel," resumed Ally. "You'll remember he's an old ex-smuggler, and knows every foot of the coast. I think he will be able to give us an idea or two. This way, Runnel, if you please. I want to ask you a few questions."

The old man inclined himself with an air of respect.

He was not merely all attention, but ready for business.

"Have you ever been at Riloff's?" pursued Ally.

"Never, sir, since Riloff took possession," was the answer. "One of my old chums wanted me to go there, saying that Riloff would give me a good job, but I refused."

"But you knew the place before Riloff's advent?"

"Oh yes, sir. But it was then quite unlike what it is now. It was an ordinary place enough in the days of Colonel Burnham, but Riloff has made great changes, I'm told."

"Do you know anything about the Crystal Grotto?" continued Ally.

"I only know that there is such a place somewhere on the coast, according to an old tradition, sir," answered the ex-smuggler. "But I never saw it, and do not know where it is. I am not sure that it really exists."

"In the old smuggling days, then, it was not known that there is a grotto of any kind near Riloff's?"

"No, sir."

"And yet you know every foot of these coasts, according to Mr. Brattle?"

"Oh yes. I know these coasts very well," answered Runnel, as a flush crept into his cheeks, "but only upon the surface. In the colonel's time, or rather when the colonel first began operations hereabouts, there was no coast-guard whatever, and for many years we had everything our own way. We did not have any use for caves or other hiding-places. We landed our goods where we pleased, at any hour of the day, and took them to market at our leisure, by the most convenient route."

"I see," commented Ally. "But with all these comings and goings you must have often passed over the pike between here and Riloff's?"

"Certainly, sir. I know the pike as well as I know the back of my hand."

"Then you can doubtless give me the assistance I need, Mr. Runnel. Do you know anything about the torpedo gang?"

"Only what all the world knows, sir—that there is such a gang. But who they are and where they are, is a matter upon which I have not as yet been able to make even a satisfactory guess."

"Permit me to give you a little information on the subject," said Ally—"confidentially, of course! The man who calls himself Riloff is the head of the gang. Their hiding-place is near Riloff's—the Crystal Grotto of tradition. They are twenty-five or thirty in number, with ramifications in Baltimore and elsewhere. We have already had the pleasure of discovering many of their secrets, but we desire to learn more. In a word, we have resolved to smuggle ourselves into Riloff's house. How can we do this?"

The ex-smuggler shifted his quid nervously and expectorated with thoughtful emphasis.

"There is a way, sir," he declared. "But I see you have an idea. May I ask what it is?"

"Of course, Runnel. I will speak in all frankness. There stands under the shed a peddler's cart which Colonel Burnham used extensively in his smuggling operations. Mr. Brattle showed me the vehicle and gave me its history. It seems that the inside is one immense box, in which half a dozen men could be concealed."

"Say, rather, in which half a dozen men have been concealed, Mr. Webber," amended the ex-smuggler, as his eyes lighted up vividly. "Once, when we had reason to expect an attack from the coast-guard, five of us took possession of that cart, and awaited the enemy's arrival.

The result was all we desired. The moment we boiled out into action, like hornets out of their nest, the officials took to their heels, as was natural enough, since we were two to one!"

"Very good, Runnel," commented Ally, with intense satisfaction. "I see that I am not mistaken about the peddler's cart. Let me now tell you how I propose to utilize this vehicle. My comrade and I," and he indicated Mark by a gesture, "will take possession of the interior of the cart, and you can lock us up therein just before our arrival at Riloff's. You will then present yourself at the house of Riloff and announce yourself as a peddler. By the way, Riloff does not know you personally?"

"No, sir—no more than I know him!"

"Capital! You will say that you have lost your way, and that you have been wandering on various cross-roads ever since nightfall, and that you have ventured, under these extraordinary and unforeseen circumstances, to ask him to kindly give you lodgings!"

"So far—good," commented Runnel, with the air of a man who sees his way clearly. "The thing can be done, without doubt."

"You will of course drive into the dooryard," continued Ally. "You will say that your cart is loaded with valuable goods, and that you cannot leave them exposed."

"All that is easy enough, sir. And once you are inside of the gates, the dooryard or whatever other inclosure may offer itself?"

"Why, you'll watch for a moment when no one is near us or near the quarters assigned you, and will slip down to us and let us out of your cart, piloting us to your apartment. Once we are in the castle, unseen and unsuspected, my comrade and I will be able to explore the premises at our leisure. Is all this feasible?"

"Without the least doubt, sir. Riloff is doubtless a night-bird, going and coming at all hours, and he doubtless has plenty of associates who are like himself in these respects, but we can of course take our chances, each of us with a good revolver!"

"And there need be no delay, Runnel, in getting ready to start for Riloff's?"

"Not the least, sir. All I require is time to grease the ancient vehicle and hitch up the horses."

A glow of resolution flamed from Ally's eyes.

"Let's be off," he said. "There's ample time, but not a moment to lose! I'll furnish you one of my revolvers, Runnel. Lively, if you please! We'll give Mr. Riloff such a surprise as he has never experienced. We can discuss on our way the various details of our undertaking and arrive at a full understanding of every point conducive to our success!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PEDDLER.

AT his desk in his study sat Riloff with moody countenance and lowering brow, and with a singularly uneasy and apprehensive manner.

"I may as well take my bull-dog," he muttered, as he slipped a revolver of .44 caliber into his breast-pocket. "Also a drop of acid, so as to be able to make a silent job of it, if circumstances should favor that course. If necessary—curse her—I can even strangle her with my hands!"

He secured a small glass flask in his vest-pocket and looked out into the night from one of his windows.

A clock upon the mantle-piece struck one.

"It's time to act," he muttered, arousing himself. "The boat is at hand if I should need it. She is sound asleep at this hour. Yes, the sooner I make an end of this matter the better."

He crossed the floor and stole out into the hall, listening intently.

"There's no help for it!" he ejaculated, in a barely audible whisper. "I am really afraid of her. I shall never know another minute of peace until I've put it out of her power to cackle."

Traversing the hall, he stole silently up a long staircase, at the head of which he again halted and looked around and listened.

The silence reigning throughout the dwelling seemed to affect his nerves favorably and he hastened to traverse a long upper hall, eventually halting at a door.

"Of course she has locked herself in," he mused. "Asleep or sulking? Which is it? I haven't seen her since dark—"

He started violently, noting by a gleam of light that came from within the room that the door was slightly ajar.

Opening the door as noiselessly as quickly, he stepped into the apartment.

(One glance was enough!)

His intended victim was not there!

"Gone!" he gasped, staring at the white counterpane upon which the moon was shining, and readily perceived that the bed had not been in the least disturbed since being made.

"Gone!"

The dark face blanched to a deathlike hue.

Lighting a candle, he explored the apartment and its surroundings thoroughly, but the result only confirmed his first impressions.

"And gone for good, of course," he muttered, as he extinguished the light and began retracing

his steps to his study, leaving the door of the housekeeper's room as he had found it. "Of course I can question no one at this hour. I can only come back an hour later. No note, no indication of her intentions! It's a bad business! Pity I didn't move in the matter sooner!"

He sat down at his desk again, and for a few moments seemed paralyzed with consternation, but at length he became calmer.

"Of course she'll do nothing rashly," he muttered. "For the sake of Paul she'll keep our secrets. Yes, yes! she is only gone in quest of a convenient point from which to open negotiations. I shall hear from her in due course! I shall know where she is in a day or two!"

His musings were interrupted by the shuffling steps of the old Cerberus, to whom he had confided the care of the premises for the night, and who in another moment looked in upon him.

"If you please, sir," said this man, "there is a peddler at the gate who wishes to speak with you."

"A peddler, Quigley?"

"Yes, sir, with a pair of horses and an immense cart."

Riloff looked puzzled a moment, and then flushed with suspicion.

"A peddler—at this hour of the night, or rather, of the morning?" he queried.

"He has met with some accident, sir, which he began explaining," said Quigley; "but I thought he had better tell his story to you. It's no great trouble to see him. Whoever he may turn out to be, sir, he's as likely to be a friend as an enemy."

"That's so," assented Riloff. "I'll see what is wanted. One question first, Quigley. Have you seen Mrs. Arbuckle this evening?"

"No, sir."

"Seen anybody leaving the house?"

"Only an unknown colored woman, sir, who came down from the housekeeper's apartments. I thought she acted watchful and scared. Has anything been stolen, sir?"

"No—not to my knowledge."

He followed Quigley to the door, and passed out into the dooryard, taking a broad drive that led to the principal entrance of the manor.

At the gate stood a large, four-wheeled vehicle, with a driver on the box.

As Riloff drew near, this individual raised his hat respectfully, and said:

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir, for the great liberty I've taken, but I had the misfortune to take the wrong fork a score of miles back, and have been wandering at hazard ever since, expecting from one moment to another to arrive at some wayside inn where I could put up."

"You are a stranger to our neighborhood?" asked Riloff, with perceptible interest.

"Yes, sir. It is the first time I have ever been here, and I haven't the least idea where I am. Seeing your light from a distance, and knowing that my horses, not to speak of myself, are completely used up, I have ventured to ask you to take me in for the balance of the night."

"Quite right," returned Riloff. "Are you a peddler?"

"Yes, sir, and that is the secret of my uneasiness," declared the applicant. "My cart is loaded with valuable jewelry and dry goods, and I have been in mortal fear that some of the outlaws who are known to exist on this coast might discover my plight and make me trouble."

Riloff bowed understandingly.

A strange gleam of covetousness and greed crept into his dull eyes.

"I can receive you with pleasure," he said in a low tone, "if you will not say anything to any of my people to arouse their cupidity. You need not mention who you are or what you are, or what you have in your wagon. Drive through the gateway into the dooryard, and thence to the front door, and I will close the gate and lock it, so that your goods will be perfectly safe as long as you choose to remain with us."

While speaking he had unlocked the large gate which opened upon the river-road, and the peddler hastened to drive in and to pass on to the front door, in accordance with his invitation.

Another moment, and he had planted the wagon near the front steps, and set about detaching his horses from it.

"You have indeed been driving far and fast," resumed Riloff, "or else your load is unusually heavy."

He felt the flank of the nigh horse, noting that the animal was panting and flecked with foam, and then gave his assistance in detaching the pair from the vehicle, remarking:

"You did not mention your name."

The peddler responded, giving the first name that came into his mind—Barton.

"Give yourself no further trouble, Mr. Barton," said Riloff pleasantly. "I will send a man to take care of your horses. Ah, there you are, Quigley," and he beckoned his Cerberus to approach. "Take these horses to the stable, and stir up Crawley to assist you in taking care of them. Give them a swallow of water a few minutes hence, but do not feed them under an hour. The gentleman is tired, and I will show

him to his room immediately, the new day being so near at hand."

"And the wagon, sir?" asked Quigley.

"You may leave it where it is. Stay! We'll place it beside the steps, so as not to block up the entrance."

The measure was soon accomplished, the peddler and Riloff both assisting.

"You are indeed heavily loaded," observed the host, with another strange sparkle in his eyes. "But your goods will be quite safe here. No one will venture near them."

Quigley had already seized the bridles of the horses, and was leading them away to a rather elaborate stable at one side of the lawn.

"If you will now come with me, Mr. Barton," said Riloff to his guest, "I will see what can be done for you. Do you want anything to eat or drink?"

"No, sir. And if I did I should hardly venture to trouble you at such a late hour."

"No trouble at all, sir," and there was a cunning gleam in Riloff's averted eyes. "Come into my study and take a glass of wine at least."

"Many thanks, sir, but I beg to decline. I cannot permit you to take so much trouble for me. All I want is a few hours' sleep."

Riloff bit his lips unseen.

To judge by his manner, he had thought of giving the peddler a drink that would have placed him beyond the possibility of ever taking another.

"This way, then," he invited. "I will show you to a room."

He led the way into a side hall where a lamp was burning, and began ascending a narrow winding staircase, quite unlike that he had so recently traversed in going upon his sinister errand to Mrs. Arbuckle's apartment.

The peddler lost no time in following him, availing himself of the light of the lamp Riloff carried.

Reaching the second floor the host turned toward the wing which contained the "lookout," plunging into a corridor even narrower than the staircase, and one that seemed to lose itself in the depths of the wing in question.

Along this corridor the host advanced a dozen steps, the peddler imitating and counting them, and then he came to a halt, pushing open a door.

"Here we are," he announced, with a graceful wave of the hand. "My house is full of company at the moment, or I should give you a better room. Walk in."

The peddler complied, and Riloff stepped into the room after him, remaining near the door.

"I am sure I shall be comfortable here," said the guest, as Riloff placed the lamp on a table. "Many thanks, sir."

"There's nothing more you want?" demanded the host, with a strangely preoccupied air.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Good-night, then," and Riloff turned to depart. "There is a bell at the head of your bed, if you should require anything. A good night's rest, sir."

The peddler made a suitable response, and Riloff withdrew with the air of a wild beast scenting its prey!

CHAPTER XV.

IN A DEADLY TRAP.

FOR a few moments the retreating footsteps of the host continued to reach the hearing of the guest, who had left his door ajar, and then they died out of the narrow and winding staircase by which the couple had ascended to the chamber.

"He has really gone," muttered the peddler as he peered out into the corridor. "So far as I can judge he has not conceived the least suspicion!"

Listening intently a moment, he slipped off his boots, substituting in their place a pair of felt slippers.

Then he stole out noiselessly to the head of the winding staircase, continuing to watch and listen.

"It's all right," he assured himself, after a long and attentive survey of his surroundings. "That man I saw first is at the stable. Riloff himself has returned to his bedroom, library, or some other apartment. I hear nothing of him. As well act now as later. It is the work of a couple of minutes!"

He stole down the narrow staircase with a celerity little short of surprising and gained the side door by which he had entered.

Here he again paused and listened.

As if to favor his projects, the lamp which had illumined his entrance had been extinguished, and he found himself sufficiently in darkness.

All continued silent.

There was not the least sign of movement around him.

"No doubt Riloff has gone to bed—or is waiting to visit the wagon later," he thought. "Be that as it may, now is the time to act!"

Unlocking and opening the door the peddler stole out to his cart, drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and unlocked the large padlock by which the body of the vehicle had been secured against intrusion.

Assuring himself by a keen glance around that no one was in the dooryard or at any of the windows above him, the peddler hastily drew open the folding-doors which had been held in place by the padlock.

"Out with you," he enjoined, in a whisper. "Quickly, and in silence! Take the door on the left and wait in the hall for me!"

There was a prompt stir within the vehicle at these words, and Mark and Ally, with muffled faces, slipped out into view, hurrying in the direction the peddler had indicated.

Closing and locking the doors of the cart the peddler hastened to rejoin them, leaving the side door as he had found it.

"This way," he enjoined, as he plunged into the narrow staircase he had already ascended and descended. "You have only to keep close to me and do as I do. I am taking you to the room which has been assigned me. Caution!"

The young detectives heeded his injunctions, soon following him into his apartment.

"There, it is done!" he breathed, after listening a moment, as he closed the door. "I am almost certain that no one has seen us. We have carried our point!"

"And here we are—in the stronghold of the enemy, and ready for business," said Ally, as he removed the scarf which had concealed his features, and turned up the brim of his hat. "You have managed the matter splendidly, Mr. Runnel!"

The ex-smuggler looked pleased at this hearty recognition of his services.

"I foresaw that we should have no trouble in getting in," he declared. "The only anxiety I have in the matter concerns our getting out!"

"But what a strange little room Riloff has given you!" exclaimed Mark, as he bent a critical glance around. "How close and damp it smells," and he snuffed the air audibly. "I wouldn't have believed that a manor-house of such pretensions could contain such a wretched little apartment!"

There was no exaggeration in these complaints.

The place was scarcely ten feet square, with bare walls and low ceiling.

The furniture, too, was most meager, and of the plainest description.

"It is close here, and no mistake," declared Ally, continuing to look around wonderingly. "Let's see if we cannot open one of those windows. The place looks like an elevator, and is not much larger. Whew! what a place for a guest! No doubt—"

He was interrupted by an ejaculation from Mark—an ejaculation of consternation as well as amazement.

"Why, there is no window here!" cried the young detective.

"No windows!" chorused his companions.

"No! They're only painted shams!"

"You can't mean it, Mark!"

"Examine for yourself!"

Ally and Runnel hastened to do so.

"Sure enough!" ejaculated the latter. "But there is an inner door—"

"That may be a sham also!" said Mark.

Startled and wondering, the trio gave their instant attention to the door in question, but only to verify Mark's suspicion.

It was merely a sham!

"You see?" resumed Mark, excitedly. "The only door here is that by which we entered. That, in fact, is the only aperture the room contains! The windows are all shams!"

The fact was verified in breathless silence and astonishment.

"How strange!" muttered Runnel, whose rugged face had flushed uneasily. "What can be the meaning of these strange facts? The place seems to be a veritable prison, a box, a trap! And now that I look closer, the walls are not papered, as I supposed, but painted!"

"And how wet and slimy they are!" cried Mark, as he passed his hand over the one nearest him. "One would say that they had recently been under water!"

"That's the sea air," suggested Ally. "You must remember that the manor is built upon a point of land which is surrounded on three sides by water. We are virtually suspended over the sea!"

"Speaking of water, I think I hear it splashing somewhere near us," declared the ex-smuggler. "Listen a moment."

All listened intently.

Sure enough!

From far, far below came up to the hearing of the trio the hollow splashing of waves!

"We're literally—not virtually—over the sea, Ally!" cried Mark, with increased consternation. "There may even be trap-doors beneath our feet to let us down into it! Hold the light here, Ally!"

Ally hastened to comply, and Mark tore up a corner of the plain rag carpet by which the floor was covered.

"Heavens! see here!" he cried.

There was no need to say more.

The floor was as full of holes as any skimmer! Holes which had been made with an augur at least two inches in diameter!

Holes capable of admitting water enough in ten seconds to flood the entire apartment!

With the removal of the carpet, too, and the profound stillness of consternation which had succeeded these startling discoveries, the splashing of the water below had become more audible.

"Give me one of those illuminators, Mark," enjoined Ally. "Quick as possible! I begin to comprehend that we are in some infernal trap. That man has seen through our little game and has taken his measures accordingly."

Mark hastened to light one of the instantaneous and vivid fire-balls with which they had come provided, and Ally dropped it through a hole in the floor, and followed its downward course by placing his eye at the opening.

"Worse and worse!" he cried. "We are suspended in a sort of elevator directly over the water, and more than a hundred feet above it!"

The fact was confirmed by both Mark and the ex-smuggler, with the aid of a couple more of the fire-balls, and the three men then stared at each other a moment in questioning horror.

"That's all I want to see," declared Ally, as he gained his feet. "We must get out of this death-hole on the instant."

He bounded to the door even while speaking, but it did not yield to his touch—not even when, startled beyond expression, he hurled himself with all his might against it.

It was in vain that he turned the key one way and then the other and pushed and pounded.

The door was fast!

The trio were prisoners!

The door had closed with a snap-lock of the kind so universally used in Europe, and with this snap-lock the key at their disposal had no connection whatever!

CHAPTER XVI.

A DEN OF CRIME.

THE consternation of the young detectives and the ex-smuggler reached its culmination at the discovery that they were prisoners in the "death-trap"—as Ally had called it—into which old Runnel had been shown by his perfidious host.

"Can the villain have seen us?" demanded Ally.

"Or even suspected anything?" supplemented Mark.

"Neither, I think," declared Runnel.

"Then why are we locked up in this fashion?" was the further problem advanced by Ally.

"So that we may never get out," returned Mark, with desperate voice and mien. "We might have foreseen, after seeing those sharks in the hold of the Alaska, that this man would be prepared for all intruders!"

Ally tried the door again.

"It's fast, there's no doubt about that," he muttered, "but if we all throw ourselves against it—"

He was about to suit his action to the word, when the old ex-smuggler restrained him.

"That'll not do," said the old man, earnestly.

"Let's realize just how the case stands. I am supposed to be alone, so far as we know."

The young detectives assented.

"I am also supposed to be tired and unsuspecting," pursued Runnel. "If we keep quiet, it will be taken for granted that I have retired to bed without discovering the nature of the trap I am in, and a reasonable time will be allowed me to get asleep."

"Agreed," said Ally.

This view of the case was only too probable.

"There is accordingly half an hour or an hour in which to take action," continued the old ex-smuggler. "In the time thus allowed us we must make good our escape."

The suggestion was well received, as it deserved to be.

"But how?" asked Ally.

"Suppose we were to ring the bell?" suggested Mark. "If it were answered, we could seize the answerer as soon as the door opened—"

Runnel shook his head emphatically.

"It is doubtful if there is any bell," he said, as he advanced to the head of the bed, and held up his candle to the bell-pull. "That may be a sham, like the windows and that inner door."

"Or, if it's not a sham, and there is really a bell," suggested Ally, "it may be that it would be instantly fatal to ring it. To ring it, would be as much as to say that the occupant of the room had made some discovery, and the natural response would be to plunge the whole thing into the water beneath, with as little ceremony as you would use in drowning a rat in a trap!"

This view was indeed the only rational view to take, and all idea of ringing the bell was dismissed on the instant.

The only way out of the strange chamber was to get out quietly and in silence before Riloff could know or even suspect the actual state of affairs.

"Fortunately we came here prepared to laugh at locks and partition walls," said Ally, as he proceeded to open a parcel Mark had laid on the table at the moment of entering the apartment. "Here are augers and saws, and all the other tools necessary for the work in hand. The only question is, Where shall we begin?"

He resumed his survey of the strange and sinister apartment.

"Evidently we cannot work downward," said Runnel, thoughtfully. "There is of course a

passage to the sea from the terrible well beneath us, but we cannot for a moment think of an attempt to traverse it. No, we must cut through into some of the adjacent rooms!"

Ally tapp'd lightly on one of the walls of the strange chamber and listened.

"We appear to be in a sort of well built up in brick or stone," he declared. "Figure to yourself an immense well, with an immense bucket in it, and suspended midway between the top and bottom, and you will have an idea of our situation!"

His companions shuddered.

"It's a regular death's hole," declared Mark. "In all the tales I've read of robbers' castles and murderous innkeepers, I have never read of a situation more horrible. But if there are walls of stone or brick around us," he added, "our only way out is at the top."

"Yes, that's the only way out," confirmed the ex-smuggler, as he shot a swift glance at the ceiling of the strange apartment. "Mount upon my shoulders, one of you, and see if there's not an empty space above us. A few taps on the ceiling will tell you."

The suggestion was quickly acted upon, and the result was all that could have been hoped for, the sound from the tapping being singularly hollow.

"You hear?" queried Ally, with an air of the keenest relief. "There is not only an empty space above us as I supposed, but the ceiling is thin. We can cut our way through it with the tools we brought to give ourselves free access throughout the manor. Let us have that bureau or chest of drawers—whatever it is—to stand upon, and I'll soon make an opening!"

The article of furniture in question was placed in the desired situation, and Ally hastened to mount upon it, auger in hand, but he found his position one in which rapid progress was impossible.

"I'll tell you what to do," he said. "I'll lie down on my back on the bureau, and you must lift it as high as you can. In this way we shall just hit it."

The suggestion having been duly acted upon, the young detective set to work rapidly.

At the end of half a minute a joyful exclamation escaped him.

"I have got a couple of holes through," he announced. "The ceiling is boards, and not more than an inch thick."

He continued his task with feverish energy and impatience, and for two or three minutes nothing was heard save the movements of the auger.

"There! Hand me the medium saw, Mark!" then said the young detective.

Receiving the instrument in silence, he hastened to join in one circle all the auger holes he had made, and had soon opened a passage large enough to give egress to the largest member of the party.

"There!" he ejaculated again. "The thing is done! Hand me one of those bull's-eyes."

Gathering himself up into a sitting posture, Ally gained his feet and thrust his head through the hole he had made.

A lantern having been handed him, he made a survey of his surroundings.

"It is as we supposed," he communicated, in a whisper. "We are suspended in a sort of well. The machinery by which this infernal elevator is lowered and raised is some twenty feet above us. The only way out is to climb the cable by which the cage is suspended."

"Can't it be done?" asked Runnel.

"Readily."

"And what then?"

"It remains to be seen how we shall get out of the room above. All I can see at present is the windlass and the cable pendent from it. Let me climb through this hole, and I will then help you up, one after the other."

He climbed through the aperture, resuming:

"Tie up the tools and hitch a cord to them, so that I can draw them up to me. Even if we do not need them elsewhere, we will not let them fall into the hands of Riloff."

The hint was acted upon, and then Ally assisted his companions to take footing beside him.

It proved no difficult matter, not even for Runnel, to squirm up the stout three-inch cable, and at the end of a few additional moments they all found themselves upon a sort of landing from which the machinery of the terrible "death-trap" was habitually put in motion.

"Good. Here's a door," whispered Ally, as he gathered under his arm the parcel of tools he had drawn up from below, while Mark and Runnel were climbing the cable. "Let's see where it leads to."

The door proved to be locked, not greatly to the surprise of the trio.

"It could not be otherwise," added Ally. "Such secrets as these," and he nodded toward the windlass and cable, "would not be left at the mercy of the first man who might chance to appear here."

He examined the door carefully.

It was of oak panels, firmly secured to a stout frame of the same material, and was strengthened by hundreds of wrought-iron nails, with immense heads on one side, and corresponding clinches on the other.

The lock was as massive as the door.

"It is well that we came prepared for business," said Ally, as he opened his parcel of tools again. "As stout as the door is, it will not long bar our way."

"Shall I not take the auger?" asked Mark. "You must be tired."

"No. You may hold the light. We must avoid these nails."

He set to work again, making rapid progress. "As to you," he added, turning to Runnel, "you must listen and keep your hand near your revolver. It is about time for Riloff to appear here to let the cage down."

He bored a number of holes near the bottom of the door, precisely as he had done with the ceiling below, and then resorted to his saw, soon completing his task.

Looking through the aperture thus made, he saw with the aid of his bull's-eye, a long and narrow staircase in stone.

The silence around the trio still remained unbroken.

"We're all right, it seems," continued Ally, after he had briefly announced what he saw. "I'll lead the way as before."

He crawled through the opening he had made, and was quickly followed by his companions, the trio finding themselves upon a sort of wide landing, from which opened a small apartment used as a tool-room.

"I'll plug the hole in the door with the piece I sawed out," said Ally. "Two or three tacks will hold it in place, and Riloff will have to look sharp to detect what has been done!"

He suited the action to the word, and then flashed his light into the tool-room mentioned.

"Suppose you remain here a few moments," he suggested, "while I step down alone to investigate the best route by which to take our departure?"

"All right," answered Mark. "Push on."

Ally began descending the long stairs, lighting himself guardedly with his bull's-eye.

As he reached the bottom, he heard a step at the end of a long corridor connecting with the staircase, and suppressed his light altogether.

Perhaps Riloff was coming, or possibly Olga might be stirring about the house restlessly, as late as was the hour.

The step having been repeated, Ally glanced cautiously in the direction from which the sound came.

As faint as was the light vouchsafed him from without, he was able to make out the outlines of a man who had placed a ladder against the house at the end of the corridor, raised a window, and effected an entrance.

Ally could even make out the man, who was no other than Major Becker.

"Yes, her room is hereabouts," muttered the intruder. "I'll chloroform her as she sleeps and carry her off."

CHAPTER XVII.

TERRIBLE DISCOVERIES.

THE watcher comprehended.

Despairing to win the hand of Olga by fair means, the desperate suitor had decided to resort to violence.

"This must be the spot," muttered Becker, as he came to a halt in front of a door and drew his figure erect. "Doubtless—ah!"

The door opened abruptly, and Olga appeared, with a lighted candle in her hand, her gaze falling full upon Becker.

"I was sure I heard something," was her greeting. "What are you doing, major?"

Becker looked at her with a stupefaction which held him speechless.

She was fully dressed showing that she had not yet retired, and her manner was perfectly cool and collected.

"I—I am here to ask you to step down to your father's library a moment," was the stammering and treacherous response.

"Indeed!" retorted Olga sarcastically. "Then why did you ascend on a ladder and force a window?"

"Well, I admit it," said Becker. "I have come here to have a talk with you at an hour when there is no danger of interruption."

"You forget, sir. Mr. Riloff's below!"

"No, he's not. He went away half an hour since on one of his usual nocturnal expeditions, taking Quigley with him. We are utterly alone here—alone!"

He smiled like a demon—with a smile that blanched the girl's features.

"You forget Mrs. Arbuckle, Major Becker!" she said, summoning all her courage to her aid.

"Not at all," he replied, grimly. "Mrs. Arbuckle is not here. If you will step to the door of her room," and he led the way in that direction, "you will see that she is passing the night elsewhere."

In the terror now overshadowing her, Olga could do no less than verify the villain's assertion, and a single glance into the room of the housekeeper told her, as a similar glance had told Riloff, previously, that it was unoccupied.

"You see, therefore, that I am telling you the exact truth," resumed Becker, his mien becoming more menacing every moment. "There's not a soul in the house save ourselves! I have

watched and waited for this opportunity. I have a boat in waiting at the pier in front of the house, and have come here to ask you—to compel you, if necessary—to take a voyage with me. Will you come quietly and peacefully, without noise or resistance?"

"Never, sir! Not a step, Major Becker!"

"Think twice, if you please!" and Becker produced a bottle of chloroform and a sponge. "If you do not go with me peacefully, I will take you drugged and senseless."

At this instant Olga gave such a great start that Becker could not help smiling, jubilantly. He thought his threats had frightened her.

He was little aware that she had caught a glimpse of Ally Webber, who, leaving his concealment, had advanced along the corridor to the maiden's protection.

"You may well weaken in your attempt to defy me," added Becker, triumphantly. "Let us have no more nonsense. Come along, on the instant, or I'll take you!"

"No you won't, major!" and the stout hands of Ally Webber closed upon him.

A brief struggle succeeded, but the major was no match for his assailant, and soon found himself prone upon the floor of the corridor, with his active adversary astride of him.

"Not a word—not the least cry, major!" enjoined Ally, as his grasp tightened upon the throat of his prisoner.

"I—I surrender!" gasped the half-strangled man.

"Then allow me to bind you!"

The measure was quickly taken.

"And now to give you a dose of your own medicine," proposed Ally, as he seized the bottle and sponge Becker had dropped.

"Oh, no—no!"

The protest was unheeded.

At the end of a brief interval the villain lay upon the floor as motionless and helpless as if dead.

"Oh, Ally!"

It was all Olga could say, as she flung herself into Ally's arms, sobbing with joy.

"The peril is past, dear Olga," assured our hero, as he soothed her with caresses. "Think no more about it! This reptile is powerless to harm you!"

"How did you come here?" resumed the maiden, with tremulous accents. "By what miracle are you here at such a critical moment?"

"I will soon tell you," replied Ally. "But first let me mention that I have two friends with me, at the head of the staircase. The first thing I want you to do is to take a look at the room from which we have escaped, after being shut up therein by Riloff, under circumstances I shall presently relate."

He led the way to the room in question, opening the door and flashing his light within.

"Do you know this place?" he asked.

"Certainly. It is a fish-well that Mr. Riloff had built when he took possession of the manor."

"A—fish-well?"

"Yes. Mr. Riloff's idea was to have fish handy at any moment, either for himself, or for guests arriving unexpectedly," explained Olga, with a countenance attestive of her perfect good faith and candor. "He's very fond of fish, and for several months after we came here he kept this place full of them. It was found, however, that they did not do well. They seemed to miss the sunshine. Their flesh was found to be flabby, and, in some cases, to have a bad flavor."

"I should think as much," muttered Ally. "But come up-stairs, where the windlass is, and show me how the thing is put in motion."

He drew the girl's arm within his own, and conducted her to the presence of his companions, presenting them to her.

"As I will explain later, Olga, we are having a little exploration of our own," observed Ally, as he removed the circular piece plugging the hole in the door and crawled through. "Can you manage to follow me—with my assistance?"

"Oh, easily enough," and she suited her action to the word. "You cut your way out, it seems!"

"Naturally enough, since there was no other way of getting out," responded Ally.

"And how did you get out of the room below?"

"I cut out of that through the ceiling," explained Ally, leading the way to the machinery he had come to examine. "To climb up the cable to this spot was no difficult matter."

"But what gave you the idea of being in danger?" pursued Olga.

"All the surroundings. To begin with, the door closed with a snap-lock."

"There are others in the manor, and I have seen them elsewhere."

"And then those false windows and that false inner door—"

"They were not only my suggestions, Ally, but they were the work of my hands. I fancied, after we gave up using the well for fish, that it would be better to make it look like a room. It was not my intention, however, that the room should ever be used."

"Then why is the bed there?"

"That was Mr. Riloff's idea," continued Olga.

with the same frankness as before. "He thought he might like to lie down there occasionally, near the water during the hottest days in the summer."

Ally scanned the lovely face beside him. It was impossible to ignore the perfect candor with which Olga had spoken.

But the young detective readily divined how Riloff had turned to a terrible account the innocent simplicity of his reputed daughter.

"I should have thought Mr. Riloff would have been afraid of being carried down into the water by some accident," he suggested.

"Oh, there's no danger of that. The machinery has long been out of order!"

"Then the room, fish-crate, or whatever we may call it, has not been let down into the water lately?"

"Not for years."

"But you must have noticed that the walls are very damp!"

"Yes, I did. But that is because of the water below!"

"How deceived you are, Olga!" our hero could not help saying. "Listen, child! It has not been a week—not one week even—since that room was under water!"

The girl started at his earnestness, but shook her head.

"Impossible!" she responded. "You forget, Ally, the machinery is out of order!"

"Out of order! Who said so?"

"Mr. Riloff. He mentioned the fact years ago, and told me not to go near it."

"Do you remember how that traveling room was put in motion, Olga?"

"Oh, yes. You see this large wheel on the right at the end of the windlass?"

Ally assented.

It was a large and solid wheel, at least six or seven feet in diameter, with a circle of stout cogs upon the rims which dovetailed into those of a smaller wheel, which was in its turn moved by a second large one.

"It seems simple enough," said Ally. "Will you show me how the fish-crate was lowered into the water?"

"Yes. You take hold of the rim of this outer larger wheel—so," and she showed him. "You then draw out this bolt or peg by which the wheel is secured in its place—so! All that now remains is to turn the wheel, and the cage—as we call it—descends slowly toward the water!"

"I see! Permit me!"

Ally took the wheel from her.

"How easily it is handled," he ejaculated, as he began turning the wheel rapidly. "How silently, too! I do not hear the least squeak. As you can see for yourself, Olga, all the bearings of these wheels have been recently oiled!"

The girl bent nearer, advancing her lamp from one bearing to another.

"So they have," she acknowledged, a look of dismay passing over her face.

"And who says the machinery is out of order?" continued the young detective, as he whirled the wheel more and more rapidly. "You see how gently and noiselessly the cage is descending into the water! There would not be the least danger of awakening the sleeper, if there was one in the cage at this moment. 'Not in order,' Olga? Why, a child could turn the wheel! In what respect could it work better?"

He continued to turn the wheel, the dismay of Olga speedily giving place to anguish, and her anguish to horror.

"It is as you say," she at length exclaimed. "The machinery was never in better order than it is now!"

"No, never," affirmed Ally. "The cage must now be near the water! A poor show for any man who should happen to be in it at this moment!"

Olga shuddered, becoming deathly pale, as she advanced her lamp, and endeavored to look down into the yawning abyss in which the cage had vanished.

For at least another minute Ally continued to turn the wheel, and then, all pressure upon it suddenly ceasing, he removed his hand.

"It is down, you see," he remarked. "Let me show you!"

He drew from his pocket a fire-ball, lit it, and dropped it into the well-like space.

It fluttered down and down rapidly, finally reaching the water, into which it vanished, with a snuttering and hissing sound.

As to the cage, nothing was seen of it.

It had disappeared, with all it contained, beneath the surface of the water.

"You see now, Olga," said Ally, his arm encircling the girl protectingly, "how terribly you have been deceived!"

Olga nodded dumbly, unable to speak or move.

The last color of life seemed to be forsaking her features.

"There is nothing out of order here," he continued, his voice and features attesting how sincerely he sympathized with the anguished girl. "I have proved the fact by letting the cage down into the water, and I will prove as much by drawing it back to the spot where I found it!"

He again resumed possession of the wheel and turned two or three minutes in silence.

As is already apparent from what we have said, the machinery had been greased in such a way as to operate very slowly, or, in other terms, greased in such a way that it could be readily handled by a single person, and even by a moderate expenditure of one person's strength.

It was not till Ally had finished his task, and secured the wheel in its place with the peg already mentioned, that Olga aroused from the sort of horrified stupor into which she had fallen.

"How cold it is here," she then said, with a shiver. "Let us go!"

Ally led the way through the hole in the door again, assisting the girl to follow him, and secured in its place the circular piece of wood he had detached.

"Hush!" then breathed Olga. "Footsteps!"

All listened eagerly.

Footsteps were indeed resounding upon the landing below, in the act of coming nearer.

"It's Riloff," murmured Olga, pushing the three men before her into the tool-room. "He is coming this way!"

It was only too true.

In another moment the terrible miscreant was heard ascending the stairs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURNING THE TABLES UPON RILOFF.

THE mood of Riloff was dark and vengeful, and he seemed wholly out of sorts, disgust and annoyance appearing in every line of his features.

"The infernal liar!" he muttered, as he reached the head of the stairs. "There's not the least thing in his wagon—neither dry-goods nor jewelry."

The listeners comprehended.

The villain had just broken into the pretended peddler's cart.

"What's his object in coming here with such a story?" queried the irate and disappointed man audibly. "Some scheme of course. But what? Who can he be, too? That cursed Webber in disguise?"

He stood lost in thought a moment.

"In any case, he'll find it easier in than out," he concluded. "I'll run him down, and see who he is afterward."

Drawing a large brass key from his pocket, he opened the door leading into the "wheel-room," passing in without remarking the hole Ally had cut, the light carried by the villain having purposely been left dim.

"The wicked man," breathed Olga in the ear of our hero. "He told me years ago that the key had been lost and that he should not take the trouble to get another."

Advancing to the windlass, Riloff looked down into the abyss beneath it, listening a moment with eager intentness.

"Of course he's gone to sleep without suspicion," he muttered, "or I should hear him raising a hubbub. And I must say that I've never run a man down with more satisfaction than I do this one."

Laying hold of the wheel Ally had so lately handled, the villain began turning it with cautious gentleness, his eyes and features glowing more and more vengefully every instant.

A couple of minutes were devoted to the task, and then he uttered a grunt of satisfaction, removing his hand from the wheel.

"There! he's done for!" he ejaculated, his visage radiant with triumph. "Not a sound, too. How strange! Never knew such silence before. Generally they make things lively just as the water reaches 'em. I can't understand it."

"I can!" said a voice beside him.

Starting violently, with a half-suppressed shriek, the pretended Russian turned his blood-shot eyes upon the speaker—upon Olga.

"You here, girl?" he gasped rather than said.

"Yes, as you see," and the girl surveyed him with the sternness of an accusing angel. "Permit me to explain the silence which puzzles you. There's nobody in the cage!"

"Nobody—in it?"

"No, sir. You've only to draw it up again to verify what I tell you."

The villain glared at the girl a few moments, and then bent a long glance around, listening more intently than ever.

He then began drawing up the cage.

"Are we alone?" he asked.

"If you'll allow me to turn up your light a little," and Olga acted upon the proposition without awaiting his assent to it, "you will probably be able to answer that question for yourself."

"I see. You've ventured to play the spy."

He did not speak again until he had drawn the cage to its place and secured it in the position in which he found it.

"No one in it, you say?" he then said.

"No one—no one!"

"We shall soon see. Come."

He led the way down the staircase, taking good care to keep his eyes on Olga, and to advance no faster than she followed.

Evidently he designed to settle with her later for her intrusion.

Arriving at the wet and dripping cage, the pretended Russian hastened to open the door,

advancing with his light to survey the interior.

"You are right," he recognized, with a horrible curse. "The fellow's gone. How did he get out? Did you release him?"

"No, for the simple reason that I was not aware of his presence in time to render him that service. Who was he?"

"I've no idea who, but he came here as a peddler, pretending that he had lost his way and got belated. He's some fraud, some villain who came here to spy me out. How did he escape?"

"If you will look at the ceiling of the cage," replied Olga, with icy scorn, "you will probably learn how!"

"The ceiling? What ails the ceiling? Ah!"

He had advanced his light sufficiently to see the hole in the ceiling, and the sight caused him to step into the cage quite involuntarily, such was his wondering excitement.

"I see!" he cried. "He cut his way out! He must have come provided with tools of some kind. But that only makes the matter more mysterious. Who can he have been? Who was he looking for? What did he expect to accomplish? I see! I see! After crawling through that hole, he climbed up the cable to the wheel-room. A risky thing, and one I wouldn't like to undertake, Olga!"

"Nevertheless—try it!"

Stepping backward, she closed the door of the cage with a sudden bang, shutting the startled man in.

It was several moments before the imprisoned miscreant could realize the situation—before he could give her credit for such a bold, prompt measure—and then, with mingled curses and threats, he hurled himself against the door.

"How dare you?" he cried. "Let me out!"

There was no response, and the villain soon became silent and watchful—the prey of a wondering consternation that was not far removed from a temporary paralysis.

Then a light flashed upon him from the wheel-room through the hole in the ceiling of the cage, and looking in that direction, he saw the maiden, with a light in her hand.

"Let me out," he repeated, menacingly.

"How dare you take such liberties with me? With your own father?"

"The question of letting you out," replied Olga, "is not just now in order. Before we discuss your liberation, I desire to ask you a few questions, with a view to becoming a little wiser than I am at present."

For a few moments Riloff glared at her as if he could not yet fully realize the evidence of his own senses.

"You can climb up on the chest of drawers, as the peddler did," suggested Olga.

"I can't and I won't!" declared the infuriated man, savagely. "If you don't let me out of here immediately, I'll kill you!"

"That's easier said than done," returned Olga, in the same stern tones she had before used. "We are wasting valuable time. At least place yourself on the bureau and thrust your head through that hole in the ceiling. We shall be able to discuss the situation much more readily if you will oblige me."

"I won't, I say."

"Then I will let you down!"

The maiden carried her hand to the wheel, as if to execute her menace.

"Let me down!" shrieked the prisoner, ghastly white with terror. "Yer don't mean it?"

"Don't I? See here!"

She drew out the bolt that held the apparatus in place, and began turning the wheel.

"Stop!" shrieked the prisoner, agitating himself convulsively in the cage. "I—I will come. Stop, girl! Stop!"

She turned the wheel a moment in the opposite direction, and restored the bolt to its place, just as as Riloff, continuing his convulsive and desperate movements, gained the top of the wet and slippery case of drawers, and thrust his head through the hole in the ceiling.

"There!" commented Olga. "We can now talk without effort!"

"Talk, Olga? What do you mean? Come down and let me out! I—I cannot talk here. I am afraid you'll lose control of the wheel. That bolt may slip out! The cable may break! Let me out, that's a good girl, and I'll excuse your foolish joking! Quick! quick! I—I am going to faint! I—I cannot get my breath!"

And forcing his body through the hole in the ceiling, he lay on the top of the cage, panting, white, and terror-stricken, and whined anew for release, in the most cowardly manner.

"Good!" at length commented Olga, as stern of mien as ever. "I am glad to see you in such a mood. We are in a fair way to come to an understanding respecting our relations. Listen!"

There was no response, and Olga advanced her light, flashing its rays down upon him.

The wretched criminal had fainted.

In a moment the ex-smuggler and the young detectives had gathered around her, and joined her in looking down upon the helpless prisoner.

For once the tables had been turned upon the pretended Russian.

They had him!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ENEMY IN POSSESSION.

The truth was, Riloff had experienced an awful shock.

He had feared for a moment that *all was discovered!*

The open rebellion of Olga to his authority seemed to point to that conclusion.

And, as is the case with so many cold-blooded miscreants, he could not bear to look defeat and retribution in the face.

Add to the shock of these withering apprehensions a keen realization of his personal peril, and take into account the natural cowardice which usually accompanies monstrous villainy, and his temporary weakness will not seem at all surprising.

Of course prompt action was taken.

While Mark slid down the cable, lighting the way with his bull's-eye, the old ex-smuggler and Ally accompanied Olga to the entrance of the cage, and in another minute Riloff had been passed out and conveyed to his library, where he was handcuffed and bound securely, after being placed in his favorite arm-chair.

When the pretended Russian recovered his senses, therefore—which he did promptly—he found himself a close prisoner in the hands of his enemies.

A prisoner, too, in his own dwelling!

This fact was the sting of the situation.

His first glance was given to the clock on his mantle-piece.

It indicated a few minutes past two.

At that hour no one was likely to be stirring either at the manor or in the Crystal Grotto, and it was with a countenance growing darker and gloomier every moment that Riloff took in the various features of his surroundings, including the presence of Olga.

How his eyes blazed!

If wrath and consternation could have killed, his captors would have quickly perished.

"What is the meaning of this violence?" he demanded, with a show of righteous indignation. "How dare you treat me in this infamous fashion?"

"Softly, Mr. Riloff," returned Ally, with smiling urbanity. "There is no necessity of mounting your high horse! In other terms, no use of putting on airs to me!"

"Answer, I say! How dare you arrest me? Have you a warrant?"

"No, and I don't require any," explained the young detective. "The only reason I need to give for arresting you is a suspicion that you are the leader of an association of the outlaws, commonly called the torpedo gang, who have so long been the terror of this region. If that suspicion should prove to be unfounded," added Ally, "I shall have a dozen other charges to make against you, one after the other, or all in a batch, as may suit me or further the ends of justice. In a word, sir, you may rest assured that I know just what I am doing!"

Riloff realized that bluster would not serve as an answer to such a full and candid statement, and he wisely concluded to hold his peace upon that particular subject.

"I comprehend your little game, Webber," he at length remarked, in a voice hoarse with suppressed passion. "You scored one with your visit here, and now you score another. You and your young friend came here in the interior of that peddler's cart, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ally. "It was the best way we could think of for smuggling ourselves into the manor!"

"I should think so! But who is the peddler, anyhow?"

"It's enough to say that he's a friend of ours," replied our hero. "His name can add very little to the luster of his work!"

"I shall at least remember his hangdog countenance," declared the prisoner, savagely. "You're a bold 'un, young man, but it's too soon to boller! You're not out of the woods!"

"It looks to me as if I were in a fair way to get out of them," declared Ally. "You've heard, it seems, who I am—who my friend is. Captain Maddar has informed you that we have come here to 'smoke you out.' Considering the shortness of my stay in this vicinity, I am not at all displeased with the results."

"To begin with, Mr. Riloff," said Olga, with icy coldness, "Mr. Webber has secured an ally in me. I have not been able to help him a great deal, but I have done what I could!"

"Ungrateful girl!" exclaimed Riloff, turning his bloodshot eyes upon her with a vengeful mien. "Is this the way to requite long years of care and kindness? Pretty language to address to your own father!"

Ally interposed with a smile.

"Allow me to advise you, Mr. Riloff, that you will 'work' the parental racket in vain, in this connection," he said, quietly. "Miss Olga knows already that a kind Heaven has spared her the shame and disgrace of having you for a father."

"Mr. Webber has stated an absolute fact, sir," confirmed Olga, as calmly and sternly as before. "I am aware that you are not my father, or even a friend, still less a benefactor. In proof of what I am saying, I need only say that

I was a party to your recent interview in this apartment with Mrs. Arbuckle!"

The declaration proved effective.

Starting violently, Riloff aroused himself with an air of enlarged interest.

"How a party to it?" he asked.

"Why, as I came to report to you that I could not find the housekeeper," explained Olga, "I overheard her presenting her claims to you in such a singular fashion that my curiosity was aroused, and I could do no less than listen."

Riloff turned all sorts of colors, remembering only too well the particulars of the interview in question.

Mrs. Arbuckle had not only asked him to keep his life-long promise of marrying her, but had threatened to expose him in case of refusal, with many other points which will doubtless recall themselves to the recollection of the reader.

"Naturally enough," resumed Olga, seating herself in a leisurely way in front of the prisoner, "I was glad to learn that there is no relationship between us, although it was no great novelty for me to hear that your real name is not Riloff. I am very glad also to have received such floods of information concerning your life and character as have poured in upon me during the last day or two—"

"Or since the advent of this handsome young Adonis," sneered Riloff.

"Yes, sir—since the advent of Mr. Webber," avowed Olga, "if it does you any good to couple his name with mine. But to come to business. Under the circumstances, you can hardly be surprised to hear that I am anxious to take a final leave of you at the earliest possible moment."

"Oh, you are?"

"And such being the case, I would like you to furnish me the facts concerning my parentage and history, my real name, how I came to be in your hands, and what are the motives of your conduct," declared Olga, earnestly. "To comply with this demand is all the reparation you can make to me. No doubt you have done me a great wrong. I begin to believe that you have stolen me from a good home and fond parents, and this is equally the opinion of Mr. Webber."

"Oh, of course—of course!" returned Riloff, as sneeringly as before. "It's the usual detective gabble, I see, that the young man has been giving you, in order to win his way the more readily to your susceptible heart! Young in years, but old in guile and cunning—that's what he is!"

"In any case, Mr. Riloff," resumed Olga, with quiet but earnest dignity, "I implore you to tell me who and what I am?"

"Willingly, on some more suitable occasion," returned Riloff, with mocking politeness. "But I give you fair notice the tale's not for ears polite! If I should blurt it out here, it would make this young gent as sick 's a dog—quite turn his stomach!"

Olga paled at the declaration, which simply expressed a horrible fear by which she had again and again been haunted.

"The man's lying, Olga," observed our hero, as quietly as emphatically. "There's not a word of truth in his dastardly insinuation!"

"You'd be less free with your contradictions, young man, if my hands were free," declared Riloff, with flaming eyes and distorted countenance. "As it is, Olga, you will live long enough to learn that I am telling you the absolute truth! If I have not told you all there was to be said in the case it's simply because I knew the information would be anything but pleasant."

A shade of unwonted color crept into Ally Webber's stern face.

"That's a lie worthy of the most unblushing of scoundrels," he declared—"such a lie as one would expect from the lips of an *Abner Radwill!*"

Manacled as he was, Riloff had started to his feet at the first half of this denunciation, with features flaming with wrath, but at its conclusion he dropped back into his seat, as pallid as a corpse, his frame shaking with an abject terror.

One swift glance only did he venture to cast upon the calm, smiling countenance of the young detective, and then he nervously tested his bonds, straining his eyes through the surrounding gloom and listening intently for the help that as yet gave no promise of coming.

"The conversation having degenerated into riddles, Olga," he then observed, in a tone he vainly endeavored to render calm, "I will say no more at present. At some more suitable opportunity, I shall not offer the least objection to telling you all I know. The only condition is that this fellow," and he indicated Ally by a gesture, "is taught where he belongs and not suffered to interfere with us."

Again Ally smiled carelessly.

"I am sorry to see you taking my presence so much to heart, Mr. Riloff," he said, "for the indications are that I shall be your most intimate associate for the next few days, and that you have barely entered upon the thorny path you will in all probability be obliged to tread. Perhaps one reason of your present attitude toward me is the fact that you are armed. If so, you must permit me to take possession of your weapon."

How hotly Riloff flamed up at this proposition can be imagined.

"Villain! you had better not carry your pleasantry too far!" looking the violence he was powerless to execute.

"Oh, I don't mind your bluster in the least, Mr. Riloff," assured Ally, as he thrust his hand into the pockets of his prisoner in rapid succession. "Ah, here we have it," and he drew out a silver-mounted revolver and held it up to the light. "A jewel of a weapon. Fully loaded, too. You believe in a caliber of good size, I see. It's a .44, same as mine. By the same manufacturer, too. As a simple measure of precaution, Mr. Riloff, you must really permit me to constitute myself the guardian of this dangerous piece of hardware until further advices."

The reply of Riloff was incoherent from the wrath of which it was an inadequate expression, but his voice rung loudly throughout the library and the adjoining apartments.

"Tut, tut, man!" enjoined Ally suddenly, as he grasped the prisoner by the arm, with the same gentle sternness he had exhibited in taking possession of the revolver. "It is rather late to have you raising your voice to that pitch. You may awaken some of the tired sleepers near us. Permit me!"

He made a gesture to Mark, and in another moment they had placed a stout piece of wood in the mouth of the prisoner, making it fast, despite his desperate resistance.

"Since you refuse to say anything about the birth and parentage of Miss Olga," continued Ally, "you force us to enter upon the path of independent inquiry. No doubt you have keys on your person that will greatly facilitate the task now devolving upon us."

The prisoner shook his head energetically.

"Unfortunately for our peace of mind," pursued the young detective, "we have learned that we cannot place the least dependence upon your assertions. It would be curious indeed if we should find that a man so familiar with locks and keys does not have a single hint of these articles on his person. Patience! the problem will not long detain us."

The little resistance Riloff could offer was speedily overcome, and then Ally drew forth a large bunch of keys from one of the prisoner's pockets.

"I thought so," was his comment, as he held them up to the view of his companions. "Let us now follow wherever they shall lead. Some of them are certainly suggestive of chains and dungeons."

He looked from the surrounding doors and windows in rapid succession, and then came back to his prisoner, remarking:

"As you see, sir, the enemy is thoroughly in possession. You can neither escape nor summon assistance. Your character for veracity being so very bad, I cannot take your word for the contents of your house or the Crystal Grotto, but am compelled to take the trouble of looking through the premises for myself. Good-by for an hour or two. We'll see to you later."

And with this Ally led the way from the apartment, leaving all the doors of the library securely locked, and taking the key of the principal entrance with him.

CHAPTER XX.

OLGA'S SAFETY ASSURED.

It was with a sigh of relief that Olga found herself outside of the house a moment later, in the midst of the mellow light shed upon the bay and shore by the waning moon.

How still the scene was, with its flashing, sheeny waters! How silent the surrounding grounds and fields!

"I thought we should not find out anything by that rascal," was the first remark of our hero as he halted under a magnificent cherry-tree and sent a keen glance of inquiry in every direction around him. "And yet we have found out enough! As you well said, he's neither your father nor friend!"

"And these are very good and sufficient reasons," returned Olga, "why I should not remain here a moment longer!"

"Where will you go?"

"Where?" and the sweet voice became almost a wail, as tears welled up into her bright eyes so freely as to be visible in the moonlight. "I haven't the least idea *where!* I am all alone in the world, Ally!"

"No, no—not while I live, Olga," and the manly face of the young detective shone lovingly upon her. "In me you have a true friend, and one who will not rest until you have been placed in good hands. You have fully decided to leave Riloff's, I suppose?"

"Yes, Ally. I shall never spend another hour in that house—at least so long as Riloff is in it. You approve of my taking this step, do you not?"

"Most assuredly," was the answer. "How could it be otherwise, after what we know of the ways and works of that man?"

"It gladdens my heart to hear you say so," declared the girl, with sad earnestness. "There are a few things in my room I would like to take with me, but I have already placed them in a traveling-bag in readiness for departure. Please

wait for me here and I will go and get them. I shall be back in a moment."

It was not without keen anxiety that Ally assented to this measure, but the maiden was absent scarcely a minute.

"That odious Becker is still lying in the upper hall where you left him," she said. "He tried to invoke my aid, but the gag you have placed in his mouth quite prevented him from becoming eloquent. It is safe to say that he cannot be heard outside of the house!"

"There let him stay till we are a little wiser in regard to our surroundings," was Ally's comment. "The doors are all closed, are they not?"

The girl assented.

"Just as you desired to leave them," she added.

"Then we may expect to find that worthy couple an hour or two hence just where we have left them," said Ally, as he took the traveling-bag from the girl's hand and drew her arm within his own. "And now to give you my advice, Olga, after a few words in explanation of my situation. You know Foreland Manor?"

"Yes, somewhat intimately."

"Well, I have bought it, paid for it, and am now its sole proprietor. By the way, Mark," he added, addressing his comrade and Runnel, who had remained standing at a respectful distance, "you may lead the way toward the north creek. You have only to follow this path," and he pointed out the route. "Miss Olga and I will follow."

Mark and the old ex-smuggler lost no time in acting upon this suggestion, and they were followed at a slower pace by the young couple.

"And so—you have really bought this great, nice house?" queried Olga. "I remember the spot well. It is one of the most sightly and charming places on the coast. And good Mrs. Gussett, the housekeeper—"

"What! do you know her?" interrupted Ally with a flush of delight.

"To be sure! Is she still there?"

"Oh, yes. I did not buy her with the house, but she has consented to remain in the same capacity in which she has so long served Mr. Brattle!"

"I remember her well," declared Olga. "She was very kind to me on two different occasions when I was a chance guest—caught there in the rain, once when I was out boating, and once when I was journeying up the coast with Mr. Riloff in a carriage. But how odd that you should buy a house, and such a big house—such a young man as you! What can you want of such a place, in this neighborhood, too, where you may stay only just long enough to 'smoke out' the torpedo men?"

"Oh, I may stay here forever," responded Ally, as he gently tucked the hand of the homeless maiden against his heart. "I dare say I shall marry at an early day. The thought has at least occurred to me."

"Ah, yes," and he could feel the arm and hand he held trembling against him. "What is more natural?"

"It all depends upon the young lady, of course," added the young detective. "If she should refuse me, I should probably refrain from housekeeping for some time to come."

"What! you don't know yet whether the young lady will have you or not?"

"No. Fact is, I haven't proposed. The young lady is in trouble just now, or I might have been more forward. Such a sweet, charming girl! To have known her has been to me a foretaste of heaven."

A brief silence succeeded—a painful one, too, if the increased emotion of Olga could be rightly read in the moonlight.

"I've had my scruples, you see," resumed Ally, as if longer silence was out of the question. "I thought it would be taking advantage of the girl to talk of love when she has so many other things to think about."

"But—it seems to me that you might have ventured to say a few words, Ally," suggested Olga, with a tender and respectful interest in the unknown maiden. "It would have cheered her so much, if she is sad and lonely, to know that you love her."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it," declared Olga. "Another thing," and her voice sunk to a barely audible whisper, "I do not believe there is the least likelihood that she will refuse you."

And then came a great sigh, while a sad, unrestful look passed over the maiden's anxious face.

"You are a charming comforter, Olga," said Ally, as he pressed to his lips the hand of which he had taken possession. "But to come back to business. We were speaking of a place of refuge for you, and it is a great joy for me to be in a position to offer you a good and safe shelter, if not exactly a conventional one, until we can discover your friends and communicate with them, or until we can make more satisfactory arrangements for your future. In a word, I offer you a home with Mrs. Gussett, at Foreland Manor, as long as you may choose to stay!"

"Oh, Ally! what a load you have taken from my soul!" exclaimed Olga, with tears of joy and

relief in her eyes. "I accept your kind offer as frankly as it is made."

"Capital! I expected nothing less of you—after what I have seen of your sound sense and your practical views of life. With good Mrs. Gussett, you will have a better and more suitable home than you have ever had with Riloff."

"I realize it, Ally. How can I ever thank you as you deserve?"

"I'll answer that question when Mr. Riloff's case has been duly cleared up," was the smiling and contented answer. "By the way, have you secured for me those two portraits of yourself of which I was speaking?"

"Oh, yes. Here they are."

"A thousand thanks, Olga," said Ally, as he received the photographs and secured one of them in an inner pocket of his coat. "I think I told you that I am going to mail one of them to my employer—to Mr. Hiram Weatherbee, of Baltimore. The other," and Ally pressed the photo to his lips tenderly, "will long remain the property of your humble servant."

"You—you are sure you prize it?" asked the maiden, with keen interest.

"More than all other pictures in the world! More even than I prize my dear mother's."

For the first time the drift of all his remarks seemed to dawn upon the maiden, and she looked almost scared with the depth of blissfulness that came upon her. His face, too, as he halted on a bluff overlooking the sea, with his face toward the moonlight, and his eyes beaming tenderly down upon her, was a revelation she could no longer ignore.

"And now a word as to what's to be done with my little wanderer," he resumed, with accents caressing as his glances. "In journeying hither by land, I did not forget the simple prudential measure of ordering reinforcements by water. No doubt they have arrived. I'll see."

After another keen glance around, he flashed the light of his bull's-eye seaward three times, with a brief interval between each flash.

"What's that for?" asked Olga.

"That's to tell my captain that I am here and desire to come aboard. You will soon see his answer."

Even as he ceased speaking, three similar flashes were given from a point on the shore of the creek not more than a hundred yards distant.

"Yes, there is Captain Drake and my submarine boat," explained Ally, as he led the way promptly toward the water, following in the footsteps of Mark and Runnel. "I am going to send you in Captain Drake's care to Mrs. Gussett!"

"Without you, Ally?"

"Yes—for this once. Fact is, I have a few investigations to make hereabouts, and I should hardly have my peace of mind to make them if you were to remain here with me—I should be constantly so anxious about you. Of course, it will not do for you to fall into Riloff's hands—after what has happened!"

"Certainly not," assented Olga, "and this proposition is far truer of you than it can possibly be of myself. I shudder at the thought of what would be your fate if Riloff or any of his terrible gang should get hold of you, after what you have done to them!"

"You may rest assured that I shall take good care not to be captured," replied Ally. "By the way, do you know how Riloff makes his way into the Crystal Grotto by that secret entrance?"

"No, Ally," answered the girl. "I have never been there but once—the time when I was so fortunate as to be your guide out. All I know is that there is a secret button in the wall of that shed which you must press in order to move the box of wood which covers the entrance of the secret staircase!"

"Well, the essential is to know that there is such a secret button," commented Ally. "I think I can find it—"

"Find it, Ally?" and the girl paled with a sudden apprehension. "Do you mean that you are going to trust yourself in that terrible grotto again?"

"Yes. I am going to visit the grotto again," declared the young detective, with a reassuring smile. "As a matter of fact, the Crystal Grotto is still a sealed book to us. There is many a strange secret in those depths, I am perfectly certain!"

"But the danger, Ally—"

"Nothing risk, nothing have, you know," said Ally, smilingly. "You cannot imagine how careful I shall be, for your sake, if you want me to be," he added, tenderly, as he marked the tears which had gathered in her eyes. "But here we are."

They had reached a bold, rocky shore, with deep water, where the Water Witch was lying, four-fifths under water, with a plank from her hatchway to the rocky landing.

Upon this plank stood Captain Drake, with eager eye and head erect, on the lookout alike for friend and foe, with a revolver ready in his hand.

"How long have you been here?" asked Ally, in a guarded whisper.

"We've just arrived, sir."

We need not pause upon what followed. It is

enough to say that Drake and Ally had an earnest talk, which lasted several minutes, and that the captain was then presented to Olga, who was warmly commended to his care. Final greetings and suggestions were uttered, hasty adieux exchanged, and then the Water Witch drew rapidly out into the waters of the bay.

"Well, here we are," said Ally, turning to Mark and Runnel, when the boat had become a mere speck on his vision, and he could no longer see the waving handkerchief of Olga. "The one great essential of the night is that we have sent that girl to the motherly keeping of Mrs. Gussett. And now to give our best attention to the business devolving upon us!"

Mark and the old ex-smuggler hastened to place themselves beside him, and in another moment the trio were on their way back to the scene of their proposed investigations.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW DEAL OF FATE!

THE rage with which Riloff looked after his retreating enemies could be readily imagined.

In all his long career of crime he had never been in a more aggravating situation.

It was bad enough to be bound and helpless—to sit there like a maniac in a strait-jacket, unable to arise from his chair, to which he had been secured.

But worse than all the rest of the "indignities" to which he had been subjected was the placing of that gag in his mouth.

It was not only exceedingly inconvenient and painful, but it prevented him from making the least outcry to any of his people who might chance to arrive near him.

What he felt he looked, however.

His aspect, as he glared around in the heavy shadows, could have only been compared to the appearance of some noxious animal in a trap.

He had struggled with his bonds until exhausted, and sat panting and despairing, when there suddenly came out of the profound silence a low but energetic knock upon an outer door near his library.

How it startled him!

What did it mean?

His first thought was of his tormentors, but he quickly realized that they would not be knocking in that fashion.

As he sat listening and wondering, the knock was repeated with increased vigor.

Evidently enough, this knocking could only proceed from some friend.

How he struggled anew with his bonds!

How he tried to speak!—to at least utter some sound that would indicate his presence!

"Are you there, Riloff?" suddenly called a voice, guardedly.

The prisoner recognized the voice.

It was that of Captain Madder!

Fortunately the prisoner had discovered, by his desperate struggles, that he could move one of his limbs a few inches so as to cause quite a loud sound by striking his boot-heel against one of the massive legs of his chair.

This power he put to good use now.

Thump! thump! was his answer.

"Are you there, I say?" called the voice again, still louder.

Thump! thump! came the response, and with what desperate vigor Riloff sounded it can be readily imagined.

"He must be stirring," muttered Madder, shaking the door vigorously. "I am sure I hear movements. Yes—there they are!"

The thumpings of the prisoner were vigorously continued a few moments, and then both men listened intently.

"Reminds me of the performances I have seen at a seance," muttered Madder. "Let me see if I can open communications with this mysterious knocker!"

Raising his voice he called:

"If you hear me, knock three times!"

Three thumps were instantly given.

"Are you Riloff?"

Three more thumps.

"Then why don't you let me in?"

One thump.

"What! you mean that you can't?"

Three thumps.

"That you are ill?"

One thump for a negative.

"Are you alone?"

Three thumps again as an affirmative.

"In the library?"

An affirmative again.

"Is any one near us?"

Two thumps responded.

"You mean that you do not know?"

The prisoner again thumped an affirmative.

"Do you wish to see me?"

A volley of thumps was the answer.

"Shall I break in the door?"

A negative.

"Shall I come around to one of the library-windows and break a pane of glass?"

Another volley of thumps.

"By Jupiter! what a funny state of things," was the muttered comment of Captain Madder, as he took his way around the wing of the manor, so as to reach the window mentioned. "This beats the tickings of Western Union. As sure's day, Riloff is in his library, and for some

reason he cannot answer in any other way than by those thumps."

Vaguely divining some strange and unforeseen state of things, Madder gained one of the windows of the library, and promptly shivered a pane of glass with the butt of a pocketknife he carried.

"Are you really here, Riloff?" he demanded, advancing his face to the aperture.

Still another volley of thumps, which now resounded upon the hearing of Madder with startling distinctness.

There also came to his ears a strange, inarticulate cry of which he could not make out the nature and purport.

"A singular state of things," ejaculated Madder, as an involuntary comment.

The volley of thumps was repeated.

"Evidently some rascality!"

The thumps confirmed this view.

"Then it's time for me to be stirring."

This view of the situation being also confirmed, Madder hastened to enlarge the hole in the window sufficiently to give himself admittance, and in another moment he had crawled through the aperture into the presence of his chief.

"Ah! I begin to comprehend!" he exclaimed, as he advanced toward the bound and motionless figure in the chair. "Let me strike a light."

He hastened to do so, and for a moment surveyed, with a horror-stricken air, the unexpected scene its rays revealed to him.

"Ah, I see!" he ejaculated, as he opened his knife and severed the cords which held the gag in the prisoner's mouth. "You've been in the hands of those young detectives?"

"Yes," was all Riloff was able to say, as he lay white and panting in his chair.

"The villains!" cried Madder, continuing to wield his knife rapidly. "Your luck seems to have been as bad as mine! There! You are free again! Let me bring you a drink of brandy before you try to move or talk."

He produced the liquid from a cupboard with the promptness of one familiar with all the resources of the place, and Riloff hastened to swallow it, at the same time gathering himself up into a natural position in his chair.

"You speak of bad luck," was his first observation. "I take the remark as an indication that you did not destroy the 'Maryland,' cap'n?"

"Destroy her? No," declared the disappointed man, with an oath. "Captain Cotter had been perfectly enlightened in regard to our intentions."

"Impossible!"

"It's only too true, sir! Accordingly, as his ship arrived near our sloop, he hove her to suddenly, lowered and manned a couple of boats, and in less than three minutes had surrounded our craft, without giving Mike and his assistant the least chance of escape! In a word, the job is a total failure!"

"And you? Why have you been detained so long?"

"Why, I was in another sloop, watching the operation, as arranged, but Cotter seems to have divined from my movements that I was in some way connected with the attempt upon his ship, for he suddenly stood toward me, with the perfectly well-defined intention of running me down. I had all I could do to make my escape by running over into the shoal water of the Eastern Shore and abandoning my sloop to the enemy. It was simply a stroke of good luck that I managed to remain hid ashore during the balance of the day. I need not detail the return. It has occupied every moment since nightfall, and we have reason to be thankful, I think, that I have escaped capture."

Riloff drew a deep sigh, uttering a volley of involuntary curses.

"Our defeat is of course to be ascribed to those young detectives," he then said. "They must have overheard our conversation, or else Olga overheard it and reported it to them. Well, well! the bright side of the shield is that you have arrived here in time to release me from the tightest box I have ever been in."

"And another point is that we will take good care to have a terrible revenge upon those intruders. Where are they now, sir?"

"Somewhere about the place, no doubt," answered Riloff, as he gained his feet and helped himself to a glass of brandy, at the same time securing a loaded revolver on his person. "Webber took my keys, and said he intended to make a thorough survey of the premises, including the Grotto."

"Then we are sure to find him."

"Oh, yes. We'll soon have him," declared Riloff, with suppressed fury. "The girl, too, as she was with him. And once they're found and in our clutches—"

He finished with a gesture that was more significant than any words could have been, and in another moment the couple were hastening out of the library, with the air of wolves seeking their prey.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HUNT FOR OLGA.

As Riloff and Madder gained the open air their gaze encountered the figure of a man who

stood leaning against a garden vase filled with flowers at the nearest bifurcation of the walks. As this man could not be made out distinctly in the shadows cast by the adjacent trees, the pretended Russian stepped toward him demanding:

"Who is it? What do you want?"

It had become a habit with Riloff to ask questions of this kind and under such circumstances with his hand upon his revolver. He was conscious of being hunted, and regarded every man as an enemy until the contrary was proven. These traits being known to his followers, they had learned to be prompt in their responses.

"It's me, sir—Henner, Major Becker's man," was the instant response, "and I came here to look for the major."

"I haven't seen him since nightfall," returned Riloff. "What reason have you for expecting to find the major here?"

"Why, he came here—"

The man hesitated a moment. Evidently the thought had struck him that Riloff might not be familiar with all the major's schemes. But he decided to be frank.

"He came here more than an hour ago," he resumed, "with the intention of carrying off Miss Olga. We brought a ladder to reach the window of the corridor leading to her room, and the major brought chloroform—"

Captain Madder started violently.

"An abduction in all its rigor, it seems," he commented angrily. "What else, man?"

"That's the very thing I want to find out, sir," declared Henner. "The major left me in charge of his boat at the south creek landing, with orders to await his return, and that's what I've been doing ever since."

Madder and Riloff exchanged glances of comprehension.

"Evidently the major has encountered the young detectives," said the latter. "In any case, we must hunt him up, commencing our search up-stairs."

He led the way in the direction indicated, and in a few moments more the three men were standing over the bound and helpless figure of the man they had set out to find.

"By Jupiter!" cried Madder, excitedly. "Here he is, Mr. Riloff, in about the same sort of fix from which I have just delivered you."

While Henner held a light, Madder set to work with his knife with the air of one becoming accustomed to the business, and at the end of a few moments the major was in a position to be helped to his feet.

No man could have needed help more.

He was unable to keep his feet, and sunk heavily into a chair, Henner hastened to bring him from Olga's apartment.

"What are you doing here, major?" asked Riloff.

"Dying—very nearly," gasped the released prisoner, after taking a dram from a flask offered him by Madder. "I was left in this fix by that accursed Webber!"

"Ah! you found him here?" pursued Riloff.

"Or he found me—which amounts to about the same thing, sir," panted the major, as Henner thoughtfully wiped the perspiration from his master's forehead. "We—we met just as I was in the act of chloroforming Miss Olga, with a view to carrying her off. I—I fancied Captain Madder had some such design, and my intention was to forestall him."

Riloff smiled grimly, much to the relief of the major, who had not made this frank avowal of his intentions without a great deal of inward fear and trembling.

"Well, you see now, major," said Riloff, "what a mistake you made in taking such action in such a delicate matter without consulting Madder."

"How a mistake, sir?"

"Why, if you and Madder had come here together, you would have doubtless made a success of your project," exclaimed Riloff, with an air which showed that the "project" would have received no blame from him, even if it had been successful. "So much for not acting in concert, my dear fellow."

"By Jupiter! it's not too late for us to act in concert yet, sir, if you have no objection," exclaimed Madder.

"Well, I haven't the slightest," declared Riloff hastily, with a vengeful gleam in his dark eyes. "Since you are both suitors for the hand of the girl, and since she has rejected you both, and made the fact fully apparent that she will never marry either of you if she can help it, why don't you put your heads together and work in concert, at least to the extent of getting hold of the girl and locking her up in some safe place? In this way you will at least come between her and this infernal Webber."

The major aroused himself eagerly, strengthening himself with an additional "dram."

"Are you willing we should do this, Mr. Riloff?" he asked.

"Will you? It's the very thing I suggest and advise," declared Riloff. "The girl is with Webber at this very moment, telling him all she knows, and assisting him in every way she can, and these are good and sufficient reasons for taking action of this sort against her."

"Capital!" exclaimed Madder. "What do you say, major? Without making any present effort to say which of us shall eventually have the girl. Shall we not work together until she is safely in our clutches?"

"Yes, if you are willing—"

"Well, I am. There's my hand upon it."

The two men shook hands heartily.

"Good," commented Riloff. "This is the first sound measure you have taken in this matter. All that now remains is for you to get track of the girl. She can't be far away—"

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Henner, "but she has gone to Foreland Manor."

Riloff and the rivals echoed the words in the greatest amazement.

"I'll tell you how I happen to know," proceeded Henner. "After waiting a long, long time in vain for the major's return to the boat, I came in this direction cautiously to look him up, but had not gone far before I saw Olga and Webber approaching. Following them and watching, I discovered that the Water Witch was lying at the north landing, or near it, and heard Webber telling the girl that he is now the proprietor of Foreland Manor, having bought the place of old Brattle."

"Indeed. This is important," commented Riloff. "Go on."

"Well, Webber mentioned that he ordered his submarine boat here as a sort of safeguard to his other schemes," continued Henner, "and he counseled the girl to take refuge at Foreland Manor with Mrs. Gussett."

"And this she has done?" queried Becker.

"Yes, sir. I saw her go aboard the Water Witch and sail away to the northward, while Webber and the two men with him came back in this direction."

"You see how simple the situation is," observed Riloff to the rival suitors, looking from one to the other. "The girl has gone to Foreland Manor—scarcely two hours away. I am as anxious as you are to see her detached from that Webber and consigned to safe keeping. It don't enter into my plans at all to allow her to get beyond my reach. You have a boat in waiting, it seems, major?"

The major assented.

"Just what was your intention? your plan of action? Let me know."

"Well, sir, I had not come to any very decided plan," explained Becker. "I have taken aboard provisions enough for a month, and my idea was to sail about the bay long enough to terrify the girl into an agreement to marry me."

"A vague plan enough," commented Riloff.

"You could not have made a success of it. So long as you are wandering about in that fashion, the girl would hope and expect to be rescued or to make her escape. Not what you want is to find some deserted place, some lone dwelling, possibly a cave, where she could have no hope of rescue."

"To be sure—that is the way of carrying our point," said Madder approvingly. "We'll not forget your suggestion, Mr. Riloff, if we are so fortunate as to get hold of the girl. You suggest, then—"

"Why, your only sensible course of action is as plain as the nose on your face," declared Riloff. "You will go aboard the major's boat, take Henner along, and sail quietly up the coast to the vicinity of Foreland Manor, where you can conceal your boat in some secluded spot. You ought to be able to find a bush-lined bank where you will be perfectly lost to all eyes, if you take the precaution of lowering your sail and unstepping your mast."

"And once hidden in such a spot—"

"You have only to watch for the girl, who will doubtless show up in the course of the morning. Should you get hold of her, major, why not take her up to the Creswell mansion, on the York River, of which we were speaking yesterday? The place has stood deserted, in a ruined condition, ever since the war, and has the reputation of being haunted, so that there are very few persons in the vicinity who are bold enough to go near it after dark."

"Capital!" commented Becker. "Let it be understood, then, that we'll go to the Creswell place, if the girl is captured. Come, captain, we'll start immediately."

"I'll see you off, as I regard the capture of Olga as an essential," declared Riloff. "I have only to add: No nonsense between you; no rivalry. Don't quarrel. Secure the girl and report the fact to me."

He walked down to the shore with the three men, seeing them off, and then started up the slope at a rapid pace toward his dwelling.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TORPEDO MANUFACTORY.

It was with a profound satisfaction that Ally thought over the measures he had taken for Olga's safety and comfort.

"She'll be safe there, Mark," was his final conclusion, as he neared the secret entrance of the Crystal Grotto. "She'll feel at home at once with Mrs. Gussett. Besides, she's under our eyes, as we may say, Foreland Manor being so near. The step's well taken!"

Such is human life, with all its cleverness and triumph. In nine cases out of ten, one is never

nearer disaster than when he fancies himself on the verge of triumph.

"But here we are," whispered Ally, as he led the way into the sort of wood-shed which had been built over the secret entrance of the Grotto. "The hour is favorable. At this moment the outlaws will all be asleep, with the possible exception of a sentry or two. In the course of the next hour," and he held up the bunch of keys he had taken from Riloff, "we shall be able to take note of everything in the Grotto."

"But it's a question, is it not," asked Mark, "how we are to effect an entrance, to say nothing about getting out?"

"Oh, I'll soon show you the way into the place," said Ally, as he turned the light of his bull's-eye upon the wall nearest him. "We press a mere button like that of an electric bell, and we can then move this box of wood sufficiently to disclose a trap which covers the entrance of the secret staircase."

"You've been here before it seems," observed Runnel, as he joined the young detectives in their search for the mysterious "button."

"Oh, yes," answered Ally. "Ah, here we are!"

He had found the "button" he was seeking.

It was cleverly dissimulated at the bottom of a knot-hole, in such a way that any one not possessed of detective sharpness, both natural and acquired, would have readily passed it over as an inequality of the stud in which it was secured.

Pressing hard upon this "button," Ally had the pleasure of hearing a sharp click under the movable box of wood which has been repeatedly mentioned.

"We can now enter," he said.

Such proved to be the case.

He had only to take hold of the box of wood to see that it moved readily under pressure.

Continuing to draw the box toward him, he uncovered the secret trap, which he hastily opened, looking down into the staircase thus revealed.

One after another, the three men passed through.

"Of course we must leave everything as we found it," observed Ally, "or we should betray our intrusion to any of the cutlaws who may be posted about this route. I think it can be done. I'll pull the box into its place, and then slide the trap-door."

The measure was duly executed, and Ally then led the way down the long staircase he had previously traversed with Olga.

The place was as dark as a tomb, save for the light his bull's-eye furnished.

Arriving at the foot of the staircase, the explorers found themselves confronted by a stout door.

"No doubt I have the key necessary to open it," muttered Ally, as he consulted the bunch he had secured, taking cognizance of the keyhole in the door. "Just which one it is can only be discovered by repeated trials."

It was not till he had tried several, and had begun to be anxious about the results, that he found the one he required, and in another moment the trio had passed through the doorway, closing and locking the door behind them.

The place in which they then found themselves, as will be remembered, was the upper end of a long lateral gallery branching from the Grotto.

Keeping his light masked, Ally listened.

Not a sound disturbed the silence save the snoring of sleepers at a considerable distance—it was not possible to say exactly where, so strangely did every sound echo and reëcho through the lofty vaults and corridors.

"Take good care of those lanterns," whispered Runnel, in a tone which showed how much he was impressed by his surroundings. "If we should chance to lose them we should never be able to find our way out of this place—that's certain."

"And especially take good care of those keys," whispered Mark, to our hero. "If they were lost all would be lost indeed!"

"Yes—so far as we are concerned," returned Ally. "Of course Riloff has plenty of duplicates, if by any chance he should be released in our absence."

"Which may occur," suggested Mark.

"Possibly. But we must take our chances. Evidently enough we couldn't bring him here with us."

He led the way along the gallery, guiding himself by a mere gleam of light from time to time, and directing his companions by a chain of hands, as well as by constant contact with one of the walls of the passage, taking care not to tumble into any hole or other pitfall, of which there were many.

Advancing in this manner, they arrived in due course near enough to the great central cavern to be able to survey it, as far as the embers of a fire in its center would permit.

Near this fire was a group of sleeping figures, whose numbers and outlines could not exactly be made out, but who appeared to be sleeping that sleep of exhaustion which is not easily broken.

"We'll take care not to trouble them," whis-

pered Ally. "In good truth, there is very little to discover in this central cavern. The objective point of our search is a thorough exploration of these great lateral passages and the coves to which they doubtless lead. We can only advance at random."

"And before advancing at all from this point, which is the foot of the passage by which we are to beat a retreat," suggested Mark, "we must try to fix the spot so well in our minds as not to miss it, even if we should be compelled to take a hurried departure."

"Better still, we must leave some object here to guide us out," said Ally. "I'll leave my coat at this angle."

Depositing the garment at the spot indicated, he led the way into the nearest adjacent passage, along which he advanced ten or twelve yards, with occasional pauses to listen and to note the features of his surroundings.

"This is evidently one of the most important passages in the Grotto," he at length whispered.

"We must follow it up and see if it does not lead to an important opening."

As the trio continued to advance their anticipations increased and strengthened, and were at length confirmed by the discovery of a pile of fine coal, of the kind so generally used in smithies.

"Nor is this all," said Mark. "I caught a glimpse yonder of a large pile of iron of all sorts, sizes and lengths. Evidently there is a smithy at no great distance."

Becoming still more active and eager in their search, the intruders soon came to a small but massive door, of oak and iron, which had been fitted into the gallery at a point where it narrowed into a mere throat.

"You see?" queried Ally, as he ventured to turn his light upon this barrier. "Clearly enough, such a door as this would not be built here as a curiosity or for pastime. There is doubtless something important the other side of it."

"If such is really the case, you ought to have a key that will open it," returned Mark. "Yes—here is one that seems to agree perfectly with the keyhole."

A single trial proved sufficient, and the ponderous door was slowly opened, in a silence which showed how well its hinges had been oiled and how nicely all its bearings had been adjusted.

Not much to the surprise of the intruders, but greatly to their joy, an immense cave was revealed, and an intense odor of chemicals saluted their nostrils.

Stepping through the doorway, after listening and watching a moment, the two pushed the massive door to in silence, and then flashed a strong light around them.

This supplemental cave was at least thirty feet in diameter, nearly circular in form, and was in places nearly as high as wide, the ceiling arching far up into the solid rock. But every niche of it seemed to be occupied.

A portable engine, several lathes, a number of shafts and pulleys, a large forge and two smaller ones, with bellows to match, and various work-benches—these were the principal objects upon which the gaze of the intruders rested, and which told them that they had entered a workshop possessing a plant of no mean proportions.

It was with a positive satisfaction that Ally flashed his light upon his surroundings.

"The workshop of the torpedo gang," he announced, with suppressed jubilation. "See here!"

Turning on the full light of his bull's-eye, he flashed its beams over three formidable torpedoes, one of which was the largest he had ever seen.

As the young detectives could see at a glance, these terrible engines of destruction were all ready for use.

"There's the counterpart of the one that struck the Alaska, no doubt," pursued Ally, as he bestowed a more critical glance upon it. "It is charged, and furnished with all its appliances, including the apparatus necessary to steer it. This is the manufactory where they are made. If any proof were wanting that the Crystal Grotto is the headquarters of the torpedo gang, we should not have to go a step further to find it."

The thought lent a strange charm to the situation of the young detectives.

They had not searched in vain.

"I see no sign of a human presence, save our own," added Ally, contriving to flash his light into the nooks and corners around him, "but here are some bunks for the use of the workmen when they are particularly busy, or have other reason to remain near their work. With these three torpedoes on hand, there is evidently no occasion for the manufacturers to apply themselves too closely."

The scene was so entirely new to the old ex-smuggler that he could only look on in wonder, the more especially as his young friends, in their professional zeal and excitement, hardly had a thought or a glance for him.

"One of the first things to do after we have finished this exploration," declared Mark, "is to make a diagram of the Grotto, with the secret

staircase, the entrance from the sea, the central cavern, and this workshop, and to send the same to Mr. Weatherbee. It would be a pity if our discovery should be lost to him entirely by such an event as our detection and murder by these villains."

"Yes, Mark," returned Ally, "I'll take good care to make a diagram of the kind indicated before I sleep. But our exploration is by no means ended. The gallery next to the one leading hither seemed to be as large and promising as any. We must retrace our steps toward the central cavern, and give at least a hurried survey to the passage in question."

With a last comprehensive glance around, as if to fix all the aspects of the torpedo manufactory in his mind, Ally proceeded to light his companions and himself out of the cave, returning cautiously by the same route by which he had come.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FACE TO FACE WITH A WEIGHTY SECRET.

THE scene in the central cavern remained unchanged, except that the fire burned low and the darkness had taken a deeper tint.

The silence continued unbroken, save by the snoring of the sleepers beside the dying embers.

Arriving at the spot where he had left his coat, Ally directed his steps toward the adjacent corridor, taking care to light his own way and that of his companions sufficiently to avoid a fall over any of the numerous irregularities and obstructions of the route.

On reaching the gallery to which he proposed giving his attention, he ventured to display light enough to give himself a just idea of it.

"As you see, Mark," he observed, "I was right in my estimate of this passage. It is evidently one of the principal channels of communication between the different parts of the grotto. It is wider and broader than the others, as well as higher. Hark!"

A faint murmur of falling waters had fallen upon the hearing of the intruders, and at the end of a few additional steps they came in sight of a tiny waterfall of the most beautiful description.

"Some brook which trickles through the porous rock into the bay," said Mark. "What a fairylike scene it would be if we dared to throw the light of our bull's-eye upon it!"

"In other respects the gallery is very much like the one we have examined," declared Ally, as he flashed his light in such a way as to show the width and height of the passage. "I do not wonder the torpedo-men have installed themselves here. They could not have found a spot elsewhere so well calculated to afford them safety, comfort and concealment."

"And it is well that we have been so prompt in our investigations," responded Mark, guardedly. "With such facilities as they have here, these men would have speedily become the terror of the whole coast. Ah!"

The concluding observation was one of pain and surprise, and the speaker fell back abruptly.

"What is it?" asked Ally.

"I have come across a wire which is stretched directly across our route," explained Mark. "Hold your light nearer."

The wire in question was so small and of such a dull color that it took the young detectives several moments to find it.

It was scarcely larger than a hair.

"A clever contrivance to signal our approach," observed Ally. "It would cut a man severely if he were to rush upon it in a hurry."

"It's a hint to bear in mind," suggested the old ex-smuggler. "There may be plenty more of the same sort—or worse yet—in some of the subways we shall be called upon to traverse. We cannot do better than keep our eyes open."

Drawing a pair of small pliers from his vest-pocket Mark cut the wire and removed the two ends from all danger of renewed contact, the trio then continuing their advance toward the outer ramifications of the gallery.

"Ah! another—and still another!" ejaculated Ally suddenly, as he came to a halt, with several wires like the first crossing his path. "This time there can be no mistake about it. They are all intended to convey a warning of our approach. I even fancied I heard the tinkling of a little bell in the distance. These wires are like the threads of a spider on the outskirts of his web and respond entirely to those threads in their purpose."

There was no gainsaying the fact.

The only use of those wires was to give somebody a hint of just such an intrusion as was now being executed.

"Perhaps they run up to Riloff's library," suggested Mark, as he proceeded to clear them out of his path with his pliers.

"Or they may run to the ear of some Cerberus much nearer us," returned Ally. "In any case, they are suggestive. They tell us that we are in a route which has been carefully and scientifically protected from intrusion."

"And of course such elaborate measures wouldn't be taken for nothing," suggested the old ex-smuggler, looking more nervous and uneasy than ever. "Perhaps we shall next en-

counter a battery that will strike us all dead on the instant!"

"No danger of that," declared Ally, with a smile. "It would be too dangerous to the outlaws themselves. No, what we shall find is that these wires communicate with Riloff's library. As Riloff, however, is just now unable to respond to them, we need not worry ourselves in the least about them."

The trio again resumed progress, but it was not surprising that they had become more cautious, looking twice before they stepped once.

As the least of two evils, too, Ally had turned on a fair degree of light, so that he could perceive any additional wires before coming in contact with them.

"Everything indicates that we are going to make important discoveries in this gallery," he finally whispered. "You see that our path has begun to incline upward, and the water has all been left behind and below us. At every step we take the walls are becoming dryer, as is the rock beneath our feet. You'll note, too, that the passage is contracting. We shall soon come to another opening, like that in which the torpedo manufactory has been installed."

The assurances seemed so likely that the two redoubled their caution, advancing two or three steps only at a time, and then giving earnest heed to all their surroundings, at the same time listening.

"Hark!" at length enjoined Mark, clutching his leader by the arm. "What is that?"

All halted and listened.

"That's the snoring of those sleepers in the central cavern," then said Ally.

"Or else it is the moving of some person ahead of us," suggested Mark. "Listen."

Again the trio complied.

"Sure enough," muttered Ally. "Such a sound could not possibly traverse all the windings and passages between us and those sleepers. This party is just ahead of us—in this very gallery, without doubt. Be cautious. I'll show as little light as possible till I see what we are coming to."

Again resuming progress, the trio had advanced two or three yards more, passing a slight projection and bend, when Ally suddenly caught Mark by the arm, who in turn passed the hint to Runnel.

"There's our sleeper!" breathed Ally, as he nodded toward a faint gleam of light which had fallen on his gaze. "Look!"

The scene was easily taken in at a glance, although it was sufficiently striking.

In an opening just ahead of the explorers—a sort of antechamber, as it were—was a visible habitation, consisting of a rude fireplace, with a few embers in it, a table and chairs, a cupboard, a lounge, a swinging lamp, and various articles of clothing, including a cloak.

The lamp was burning dimly, as if getting destitute of oil, but its rays sufficed to reveal a feminine figure which lay on the lounge.

It was from this sleeper that came the snoring which had fallen upon the hearing of the explorers.

"Who can she be?" asked Mark.

"Such a start as she gave me," whispered Ally, excitedly. "My first thought was of Mrs. Weatherbee—who was carried off three months ago, Mr. Runnel, by some person unknown, but who was doubtless acting for Riloff," he added, for the benefit of the old ex-smuggler. "But I see now that she cannot be Mrs. Weatherbee. Her figure is altogether different."

"I should think as much!" returned Mark, as the snoring suddenly ceased, and the sleeper stirred uneasily, turning her face toward the intruders. "See! She's a wench, as black as the ace of spades!"

The statement was literally true.

"But if not a prisoner, as you first thought," added Mark, "it is quite possible that she may be the guardian of a prisoner."

"True, Mark," and Ally's interest suddenly became more intense than ever. "This place is so much like an antechamber that it's only reasonable to think that there must be a chamber beyond it."

"Then the question is, how shall we arouse this old creature? In a sudden and violent manner, all springing forward at once?"

"No. We'll arouse her as indirectly as we can. That is to say, we'll turn on our light, and advance as boldly as if we were the proprietors of the premises. The thing to bear in mind is to be ready to squelch the old woman if she should be inclined to yell."

"Come on, then," said Mark. "I see there is fuel at hand, and one of the best things to do first is to replenish the fire."

He suited the action to the word, and in another moment a ruddy blaze illuminated the whole scene in which the explorers were figuring.

"Here's another thing that's suggestive," added Mark, as his glances roamed over the objects on the table, "the remains of a dainty repast, including broiled chicken."

"No, Mark!" protested Ally excitedly.

"It's even so, Ally, and—another significant fact—this splendid morsel of fowl has not received the slightest attention. There's evidently a prisoner hereabouts; that prisoner is a lady;

and that lady is too ill or weary or despairing to eat broiled chicken."

"How you do go on, to be sure, Mark," exclaimed Ally. "There is nevertheless a great deal of significance in what you are saying. I see this old snowball is about to open her eyes upon us as widely as she has already opened her countenance, and perhaps we shall be able to extract a grain of truth from her."

Advancing a step or two while speaking, Ally flashed the rays of his bull's-eye into the old woman's face, thereby increasing, in a marked degree, the uneasiness she had already exhibited.

She even carried her hands to her face, and emitted an audible sign of annoyance at the disturbance of which she was the victim.

And then she turned away her face, becoming quiescent and sleeping more soundly than ever, not even a snore disturbing the silence.

"I comprehend," said Ally, after smelling an empty bottle he had remarked on the table. "This old ogress has taken too much of a prohibited element. In other terms, she's too drunk to know herself from a last year's almanac. We shall be under the necessity of continuing our explorations without her."

"So much the better, no doubt," said Runnel, very seriously. "We need not fear the uproar and alarm she might have otherwise caused us. Besides, I do not believe we should have got a word of truth out of her. What could she have told us more than we are now in a position to learn for ourselves?"

"True, Runnel," said Ally, with a preoccupied air. "Is not that a key on the table? The key of some prison hereabouts, there can be no doubt. And this prisoner—"

"Can be no other," suggested Mark, "than Mrs. Weatherbee, the wife of our employer. We have never doubted a moment that she was abducted in the interest of Riloff. And is not this the very spot where he would conceal his captive? Is not this drunken old Hecate the very sort of woman he would have put in charge of her? Let us first make sure that there is really a dungeon at the end of the gallery, and we shall then know just what to think and what to do."

"Come, then."

Motioning to Runnel to remain on guard over the sleeping negress, Ally led the way rapidly along the gallery, but for a very brief instant only, a few steps having sufficed to bring him to a stout door, of iron and wood, like that which guarded the entrance of the torpedo manufactory.

"You see?" exclaimed Mark excitedly.

"Yes, and this fact is enough for our guidance," declared our hero. "We are face to face with a weighty secret."

CHAPTER XXV.

A DELIGHTFUL DISCOVERY AND RESCUE.

CONVINCED that they had a dungeon of some sort before them, Ally and Mark exchanged glances of earnest inquiry.

The question was, *How to get at it?* that question which so constantly enters into all the affairs of life, in all situations, and upon all occasions.

"Suppose there should be a lady imprisoned here?" suggested Mark. "This is hardly a suitable hour to burst in upon her. She's likely to be asleep, and as she would suppose us to be Riloff or some of his crew, she would be frightened out of her senses."

"To avoid that," returned Ally, "we must announce beforehand that we are friends who have come to save her. We must proceed with all due gentleness and thoughtfulness."

"And perhaps the place 's as empty as a sieve," continued Mark. "Or it may be tenanted by a 'snow-ball' like the one we left in that outer room. Or it may be that Riloff has shut up one of his refractory pirates in this dungeon. Or the place may simply be another workshop."

"Can't you suggest a few more theories?" demanded Ally, with a smile. "Perhaps the place is the haunt of Sindbad the Sailor. In any case, we shall not arrive at any satisfactory result if we stand here and speculate as to what the dungeon contains. Let's get at the facts."

He knocked discreetly upon the massive door, and waited for an answer.

He was pretty sure, thanks to a large crack under the door, that he heard a stir within the apartment, but no response was made to the knock.

Again he announced his presence, and this time with a vigor corresponding to his excitement.

"Who's there?" called a feminine voice, with intonations of terror and apprehension.

At this response, all the blood in Ally's body seemed to gather in his face, only to recede abruptly and leave him as white as a sheet.

That response was terribly and grandly significant.

There was a lady, then, imprisoned in that terrible place, and who could she be except Mrs. Hiram Weatherbee?

To put an end to his torturing doubts, the young detective answered:

"A friend, madam! Neither Riloff nor any of his people."

"What do you want?"

"I am here to release you."

There was a start, as of inc y; then a second start, as of terrible excitement.

"Who sent you?" continued the prisoner.

"A Baltimore gentleman—Mr. Hiram Weatherbee!"

There was no mistaking the sounds that came from the interior of the dungeon, as the result of Ally's frank declaration.

He realized that the lady had bounded from her couch, in a distant corner, and rapidly crossed the floor to the entrance.

"Pardon me if I seem unnecessarily suspicious," said the lady. "Where is Willsie—the old colored woman who has been watching outside?"

"She is in a drunken stupor—wholly helpless and unconscious," answered Ally. "I found an empty bottle smelling of whisky on her table, with the key of this place beside it."

"And Riloff?"

"Is a prisoner in his own library—gagged and bound—or he was when I left him."

"This seems too good to be true!" declared the captive, between hope and fear. "Are you alone?"

"No, madam. Another young detective is with me."

"Ah! you are a detective?"

"Yes, madam."

"What is your name?"

"Ally Webber."

"Can you give me some evidence of having been employed by Mr. Weatherbee?"

"Certainly, madam. Numerous letters from him, and other documents, including instructions and a general letter of introduction—"

"Pass them under the door, please."

Ally hastened to comply.

"Many thanks. Now, a few matches, please." The matches followed the testimonials.

"Thanks again. Wait a minute."

As stout and thick as was the door, Ally heard the scratching of a match, which was followed by a startled exclamation.

"Oh, it's all true!" rung out a voice so joyfully that Ally could hardly recognize it as the same which had so recently and severely questioned him. "Thank God! thank God!"

"You are satisfied, then?" called Ally.

"Oh, yes—yes! Quick! Open the door and come in. You have the key, I hope?"

"Yes, madam," and Ally produced the one which had been found on the table. "Do not be frightened. We will let ourselves in."

He inserted the key in the lock, and in another moment pushed the door open gently, presenting his face at the aperture.

"What! you have no light?" he cried.

"No, sir. Riloff has not allowed me to have any for several days past."

"The miscreant!" commented Ally, his voice proclaiming his indignation. "Take this bull's-eye, madam, and accustom your eyes to its light for a moment," and he passed the lantern to the fair, thin hand extended to receive it. "We will wait until your eyes can bear the light sufficiently to make us out."

"You are very thoughtful and kind, Mr. Webber," returned the lady. "Come in—your friend with you. I recall your name now. Mr. Weatherbee spoke of you, one day, as a rising young pilot and detective who would be prompt to make his mark."

"Mr. Weatherbee has spoken of me far better than I deserve," declared our hero modestly and sincerely, as he pushed the door wider ajar and stepped into the apartment, uncovering his head and offering his hand. "Allow me, dear madam, to present to you a very dear friend and valued assistant, Mr. Mark Sherman, who is also in the employ of Mr. Weatherbee, although his name may not be mentioned in any of the documents I have handed you."

"I remember your name, too, Mr. Sherman," declared the lady, shaking hands with the handsome young hero, whose face flushed with delight at the lady's greeting. "You, too, have been mentioned by Mr. Weatherbee as one of the noblest and most capable young men within the whole circle of his acquaintances. You really must excuse me, gentlemen, for having received you in such an awkward fashion. To begin with, your knock woke me out of a sleep that was not much better than a nightmare, and I could not readily get the idea out of my head that Riloff was essaying some new villainy—"

"There is not the least occasion to excuse yourself to us, madam," interrupted Ally, with a sincerity about which there could be no question. "The wonder is that you have 'pulled yourself together,' as the phrase says, so soon, in view of your situation, your surroundings, the lateness of the hour, what you have to fear from these horrible miscreants, and all that. It is quite enough that you understand who and what we are. Can you now bear that we should have a little light?"

"Oh, yes—the more the better," declared the lady, with a voice as radiant as her features. "My eyes are not so weak as I feared they would be."

"And your health, madam?" asked Ally.

"It is still good, Mr. Webber," was the reply.

"I have suffered agonies here that were a thousand times more terrible than death, but I have never ceased for a moment to hope that the right would eventually triumph. Do you know where we are?"

"Certainly, madam."

"Underground, are we not?"

"Yes, in a place known as the Crystal Grotto—one of the most curious caves on the Virginia coast."

"The Crystal Grotto!" repeated the lady. "I remember reading a legend about such a place in one of the old histories. You can hardly realize, I fear, gentlemen, that I had no knowledge of my whereabouts until this moment."

"Indeed? That's strange," commented Ally. "Old Riloff must have taken especial pains to keep you in ignorance."

"All the pains in the world," assured the lady. "He allowed no one to give me the least information upon that matter. By the way, have you any suspicion in regard to my identity?"

"No, madam—no suspicion, but a fair share of information," answered Ally, with a smile as charming as his mien. "When Mark and I set out on our travels, we are never caught without a few necessary documents, and on this joyous occasion we both happen to have your photographs in our pockets."

"You know who I am, then?"

"Oh, yes. I recognized you from your picture the moment I set eyes upon you. You are the lady we have so long been looking for! You are Mrs. Hiram Weatherbee!"

"Yes, I am Mrs. Weatherbee," acknowledged the lady, as a radiant tinge of gladness swept over her pallid face. "Need I say, gentlemen, what a joy it is for me to see your noble young faces beaming into this darkness upon me? Thank God!" and she raised her tearful eyes reverently, "I live again!"

"Come!" said Ally, dashing his hand across his eyes and drawing the lady's arm within his own. "Our one thought must now be to get out of this place. Lead on, Mark. The sooner we can get up into the light of the coming day, the better!"

Very tenderly and thoughtfully, like two gallant knights, the young detectives conducted Mrs. Weatherbee past the helpless Willsie and along the dark gallery, until they had retraced their steps to the central cavern, the old ex-smuggler bringing up the rear, revolver in hand, after Ally had briefly announced to the rescued lady the presence and identity of this member of the party.

Here Ally felt the hold of his fair charge upon his arm becoming heavier, and he realized how feeble she had become through her long captivity, despite the heroic courage and energy of her soul.

"We noticed that you have not been able to touch the broiled chicken provided for you," remarked Ally, as the party halted for a moment, to allow the rescued lady to rest.

"What broiled chicken?" asked the lady, wonderingly.

Ally explained about the tray of food he had found upon Willsie's table.

"She did not offer me any supper," declared the rescued lady, with a sad smile, "and I realize that she was too far gone in her cups to eat it herself, as she generally does."

"What! she has dared to take such liberties?" demanded Ally, with flashing eyes.

"She has merely taken her cue from Riloff," said the lady. "He has not cared particularly whether I had anything to eat and drink or not. At times I have nearly died of hunger and thirst."

"Horrible!" commented Ally, his voice becoming hoarse with suppressed wrath. "Permit me to offer you a drop of brandy from my flask, with a soda cracker."

The lady thankfully accepted.

"Do not fear," added Ally, as she shrunk visibly from the group of sleepers in the central cavern, whose presence was still announced more or less distinctly by their nostrils. "We do not go near them."

He waited until the lady had partly consumed the cracker given her, employing the interval in giving her, with rapid whispers, an idea of her surroundings.

"Now we'll go on," he then said, "if you feel strong enough. Of course you cannot really draw a long breath until you are out of this horrible place."

Crossing the gallery and securing his coat, Mark led the way into the long passage by which they had come from the secret staircase, continuing to light the way of the rescued lady and Ally with a single slender thread of light, and in due course, without being seen or heard, they arrived at the stout door which separated the staircase from the grotto.

By this time Mrs. Weatherbee was literally panting for breath, and Ally comprehended at a glance that she would not be able to ascend the long series of steps which lay between her and freedom.

To find the key and open the door was the work of a few brief instants, and the quartette passed through, the old ex-smuggler securing the door behind them.

"Now, Runnel, take the bull's-eyes and light us," enjoined our hero. "You remember, Mark, how we used to make a 'lady's chair' at school to carry the girls across brooks and up steep banks? We must make one now."

"I think I can walk," remarked Mrs. Weatherbee. "I—I dislike to put you to so much trouble."

"It's no trouble at all," protested Ally. "Besides, even if you are still able to walk, it will be wise to husband your strength. We are by no means at the end of our journey. Permit us to spare you as much as possible."

Very carefully and tenderly the young heroes formed their "lady's chair," with their stout hands and arms, and, resigning herself with a grateful sigh of relief to their wishes, Mrs. Weatherbee accepted the proffered support, throwing her arms around their shoulders, and was borne swiftly up the long and narrow staircase, until Runnel's further progress was checked by the trap-door covering the secret entrance.

"Oh, what do I not owe you!" murmured the lady gratefully. "I should never have been able to make my way out of that underground world unaided—never! You have literally saved both my life and reason!"

Briefly expressing his thanks for these heartfelt assurances, Ally directed Runnel how to slide the trap-door and roll away the box of wood above it, and in another moment this barrier had been safely passed and the quartette had emerged with safety into the woodshed which served to cover and dissimulate the secret entrance.

"Courage now, Mrs. Weatherbee," whispered Ally, as the young detectives gently placed her in a rude chair which caught their gaze. "We are already at the surface."

Still bearing their graceful burden between them the young heroes resumed progress, passing out of the shed into the open air, while Runnel made all snug behind them, leaving everything as they had found it.

The waning moon was still shining brightly, with numerous patches of clouds around it, but with its light was blending, especially near the eastern horizon, a few rosy tints indicative of the speedy coming of a new day.

A gentle breeze was ruffling the waters of the bay, which glistened and shimmered in the moonlight like silver.

Never before had the rescued lady been so susceptible to the balmy zephyrs fanning her cheeks and forehead.

"Oh, blessed—blessed change!" came from her white lips as she raised her hands almost convulsively. "What a transition from that dark, foul hole behind us! What joy and relief! What a radiant mercy!"

And then, her faint tones dying away in an incoherent manner and her hold relaxing abruptly upon their shoulders, the young detectives comprehended, even before glancing at her pallid face, that her emotions had overcome her strength and that she had fainted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN AGGRAVATING PROXY.

THE first measure of the young detectives was to send a keen glance in every direction around them, at the same time listening intently.

They were only too conscious of the extreme peril of their situation.

Two or three men, with a helpless woman in their hands, could not hope to long hold their own against such a force as the torpedo-men could launch against them at a moment's notice.

But they did not lose heart.

To the contrary, they grew more resolute every moment in the good work upon which they had entered.

"We must take the precaution of transporting the lady to the center of this clump of bushes at the side of the shed," said Ally, hurriedly. "At this hour some one is likely to be stirring at any moment hereabouts, and we shall be discovered!"

Mark glanced at the refuge suggested.

"You are right," he returned. "That's the first step to be taken."

Still in her chair, half seated, half reclining, Mrs. Weatherbee was quickly conveyed to the nook in question.

"Quick, Ally! We must have some water!" then exclaimed Mark, carefully supporting the lady's head.

There was more in these words than would have been apparent to a casual hearer.

Not only was water wanted, but Ally was the only one in the party who knew where and how to get it, for which information he had to thank the day he had passed at the manor as Harry Golos.

"Quite right," he answered. "I will go and get it. Meanwhile, administer another drop of brandy," and he produced his flask. "Kill anybody at sight who molests you in my absence!"

Stern and determined, he sprang away like a rocket, and vanished the next moment in the shaded walk leading to the manor.

"Keep a sharp lookout around us, Runnel," ordered Mark, as he poured a small dram of

brandy down the lady's throat. "You see no one?"

"No, sir. But there is a gap in the bushes on this one side," and he indicated the spot. "And I suggest that a bush or two be stuck there to mask us."

"A good idea," commented Mark. "Hasten to act upon it."

To cut down the bushes he wanted and stick them into the ground at the spot designated was the work of a few moments.

"Yes, that's better," added Mark. "If any one approaches the shed from that side they will not be so likely to see us."

The ex-smuggler then joined Mark in chafing Mrs. Weatherbee's hands.

"She seems barely alive," whispered Runnel. "I can't see that she's breathing!"

"Oh, yes," returned Mark. "I can just make out that fact, thanks to the moonlight, and especially to the glow of the eastern sky which descends directly upon her face. But if her situation is not decidedly critical, I am greatly mistaken!"

How anxiously the couple waited for the return of Ally can be imagined. His absence proved a much longer one than they expected, but he was at last seen coming back even more swiftly than he had vanished. In his hand he carried the pail of water he had taken such risks to secure. Mark readily detected by his mien, without the hint afforded by the flush of excitement on his face, that he had been startled.

"What is it, old fellow?" he demanded.

Ally did not reply until he had sprinkled the lady's face and bathed her hands and wrists.

"Major Becker has been released," he then said, "and so has Riloff. Both are gone!"

"Gone?"

"There is a broken pane of glass which shows that Riloff's rescuer entered by the window," explained our hero. "It's clear enough that we hadn't more than got out of the way when some of the torpedo-men turned up to the rescue."

"Then why didn't Riloff at once follow us down into the Grotto?" asked Mark. "True, our stay there, although so fruitful of discovery, did not consume a great deal of time; but I should have thought Riloff would have bent all his efforts to capturing us before we could get out of those long galleries."

"That certainly ought to have been his first measure," declared Ally. "I can only suppose that his attention has been drawn elsewhere."

We shall see later what had happened.

"The lady's case is serious," resumed Ally, after giving his attention to Mrs. Weatherbee a few moments. "I should be better pleased if she would show some sign of life, even to the uttering of a groan. This deathlike inertness scares me."

"Hark!" enjoined Mark. "Some one is coming!"

A heavy, rapid tread, like that of an angry man, or of one in a hurry, had indeed resounded, coming nearer rapidly, and the next instant Riloff loomed up into view, coming from the shore of the south creek and directing his steps toward the woodshed the intruders had so lately traversed.

His very walk attested that he had never been in a more terrible passion.

At the very instant he thus drew near from the direction indicated, another figure appeared to the gaze of the watchers, coming from the direction of the stable.

This new-comer was Quigley, the Cerberus who had been in charge of the manor for the night, and who had received the pretended peddler at the moment of his arrival, as related.

The face of Quigley was serious, his air watchful, and he carried a revolver in his hand, in readiness for instant use.

"You've seen nothing of 'em?" questioned Riloff, with feverish impatience.

"Not the least trace, sir."

"Nor of any other intruder?"

"No, sir."

Riloff looked relieved.

"Well, I've accomplished what I had on my mind, Quigley," announced the pretended Russian, with a long sigh of relief. "I have conveyed all my money and valuables to the hiding-place of which we were speaking!"

The listeners comprehended why the hunt for them had been temporarily adjourned.

"Yes, Quigley, that point has been secured, and that is really the great essential," resumed Riloff, lowering his voice, but not enough to prevent his words from being audible to the group concealed near him. "If these accursed detectives should 'smoke us out'—as they threaten—you and I, and one or two others in whom we have confidence, can pull out for the West Indies in a sloop or schooner, and take enough hard cash with us to set up as gentlemen in any part of the world!"

"Yes, sir. And, as you suggest, this is the great essential!"

"But I've by no means lost sight of those detectives, Quigley!" declared Riloff. "If they have been so bold as to enter the Grotto, we still have ample time to secure them, not to mention that they could not possibly take step in those galleries without being betrayed into the hands of our people! Ten to one, Quig-

ley, if they've taken this course, they've been already captured, and it was a reflection to this effect that induced me to give my first attention to making sure of getting away with the money!"

Again the deeply interested listeners comprehended.

The dangers of the Grotto, as thus referred to, were the wires the intruders had encountered, not to speak of old Willsie and the other occupants of the place.

"But I am now going to settle this question of their whereabouts," resumed Riloff. "Remember! they're to be killed at sight, whenever you meet them!"

"That's been my intention, sir," and the fellow exhibited his revolver. "Do you want me in the Grotto?"

"No, Quigley. I want you to go back to the stable and help Crawley hitch up the horses which were brought here by that pretended peddler. Put them in my top-buggy and let them stand upon the floor, all ready for a start. I don't know as I shall have use for them, but I want them to be there as a simple precaution, either for our own safety or to use in running down those accursed detectives!"

"I comprehend, sir," said Quigley, turning away. "Is that all, sir?"

"All for the moment. But remain with Crawley, so that I shall know where to find you, if you should be wanted. Take good care not to let any of those men get nearer than to offer a good mark for your revolver. It's high time they were wiped out!"

"Will Becker and Madder go with us, sir, if we are compelled to beat a retreat?" asked Quigley, halting a moment.

"Probably not. Did I not mention the fact that they have gone to Foreland Manor to capture the girl? If they're successful, we shall see nothing of them for several days, and may regard them as out of the game, or at least out of our share of it, as our fate will doubtless be decided within twenty-four hours!"

And with this he waved off Quigley, who turned and began retracing his steps toward the stable.

The anguish these concluding words gave our hero can be imagined.

Becker and Madder already on their way to Foreland Manor to seize Olga!

His brain reeled at the thought.

For a few moments Riloff did not stir from the spot where Quigley had left him, or even look up, but seemed absorbed in some of the nefarious calculations of which the situation was so productive.

"If Becker and Madder succeed," he at length muttered, "I shall get square with the girl, and needn't give another thought to her. The one point I now have to carry is to get hold of those detectives. Ah!"

He suddenly struck an attitude of surprise, and fixed his gaze critically upon the bogus trees Runnel had planted.

"Certainly, those bushes were not there yesterday," muttered Riloff. "What's the mystery?"

The remark shows how carefully this bold and unscrupulous desperado was in the habit of noting his surroundings.

Puzzled rather than suspicious, he took a few steps rapidly, and caught the top of the nearest bush, giving it a jerk, when the nature of the simulation became instantly apparent.

Ere he could utter a cry, or even take another step, Mark and Ally were upon him.

How terribly he struggled, how desperately he tried to notify Quigley of his misfortune, will be understood without the telling.

But all in vain.

The old ex-smuggler was prompt to join his forces to those of the young detectives, and in less time than it takes to record the fact the pretended Russian was bound and gagged.

How his eyes glared at his captors!

The thought that he was again in the humiliating and threatening situation from which he had so lately been delivered, seemed enough to drive him distracted.

If anything were wanting to complete the rage and consternation of Riloff, it arrived a moment later, when he chanced to turn his head sufficiently to detect the presence of Mrs. Weatherbee, whose pallid features were now revealed clearly in the rapidly-increasing light of the morning.

"Can you carry him, Runnel?" asked Ally, turning to the ex-smuggler. "If so, Mark and I will back him on your shoulders."

"I can at least try," answered Runnel. "I should say the job's not difficult, if the distance to 'carry him' is not too long."

"It's only to carry him to the manor," explained our hero. "Here he is."

Runnel bent his back to the burden, reaching his hands over his own shoulders and grasping the collar of Riloff's coat firmly, thus holding him in place, despite some awkward and violent movements of the pendent limbs.

"Oh, yes—I can manage him readily enough, sir," assured Runnel, after he had given the prisoner two or three jolts on his back and planted him to his satisfaction. "But why carry him to the house? Why not let me dump him into the creek, and so make an end of him?"

"He's not ours to dispose of," responded the young detective gravely. "He belongs to the law and to justice—to that justice he has so long defied and outraged. Hurry away with him."

Waiting only long enough to see their assistant fairly in motion, Ally and Mark raised the insensible figure of Mrs. Weatherbee between them, as gently as possible, and took the same direction.

"There's no question of any attempt to remove her to Foreland Manor in this condition," observed Ally gravely. "We must boldly take possession of the manor, keeping both the lady and Riloff with us until there is a change for the better."

Mark nodded assent.

Keeping a keen watch around them, the young detectives gained the manor, taking possession of the largest reception parlors.

"You may help Runnel transport the prisoner to his library, Mark," said Ally, when they had gently deposited Mrs. Weatherbee on a handsome satin-covered sofa. "If we should be so fortunate as to restore her to consciousness, we don't want her gaze to fall upon that scoundrel."

The transfer was quickly made.

A moan came from Mrs. Weatherbee's lips, as Mark came back from the library, where the old ex-smuggler had been left in charge of the prisoner.

"A good sign," commented Ally, who was busy with his ministrations. "She seems to be coming around, after all. What ails her is sheer exhaustion for the want of food. Ransack the pantry, Mark, and see if you cannot find some nourishing dainty that she can manage."

The hint was enough.

Mark was soon in possession of the kitchen, with a good fire, and was busy as a bee with his preparations to respond to the charge given him, his every thought being of tea and toast, jellies, bread and butter, cold ham and chicken, and especially chicken broth, he having encountered a succulent, jellied stew Mrs. Arbuckle had prepared with a view to her own flight, but which she had left behind in her excitement.

"That's the only thing needful," mentally decided Mark, after he had tasted the stew. "All I have to do is pour in a little water and bring it all up to a boil. Of course she must have it hot!"

He hardly looked up from his self-imposed task until he had loaded a tray with everything that he thought would tempt a feeble appetite, and then he took up a prompt line of march to the reception-room.

To his great joy he found that Mrs. Weatherbee had just become conscious of her surroundings, although not yet able to raise her head from the arm of the sofa.

"Just in time, Mark," cried Ally, as he caught sight of the steaming tray. "Mrs. Weatherbee is only wanting your ministrations to be herself again."

The lady smiled faintly, looking from one to the other.

"I am sure no lady in distress ever had more devoted friends," she murmured, sitting up, with Ally's aid. "But what have we here?" and her glances roamed over the tray Mark held upon his knees before her. "Enough for an army. How nice that tea looks! That chicken broth is the very thing! Can't you both join me?"

"Yes, we will," replied Ally, with a smile of the keenest, most heartfelt relief at the turn affairs had taken, "and you may be sure that we shall set you a most excellent example. Our whole future hinges, Mrs. Weatherbee, upon your capacity to lay in a little strength immediately from these ample supplies."

"Then I shall most certainly try to respond to your wishes," declared the rescued lady, as a faint glow began to be perceptible in her cheeks, and she applied herself to the chicken broth with a vigor worthy of the situation. "Better than all these material things, I do believe, is the effect of having two such noble protectors and defenders."

For the next few minutes the attention of the trio was given wholly to the excellent repast which had been so quickly improvised from the resources of the manor.

The thoughts of the young detectives were necessarily, to a very great extent, of a painful and anxious character, but they took good care not to allow the least hint of them to disturb the appetite of Mrs. Weatherbee.

"There, I feel like a new woman!" exclaimed the lady, as she relinquished her cup, which she had twice emptied. "This timely nourishment has wrought marvels."

"And, curiously enough, we have not laid in these supplies a moment too soon," muttered Mark, as he glanced away from one of the windows, "for here comes that Quigley!"

Alley hastened to look out.

"Sure enough!" he ejaculated. "The war is now to be resumed!"

CHAPTER XXVII. HOLDING THEIR OWN.

NATURALLY enough, the approach of Quigley gave Mrs. Weatherbee a thrill of consternation.

"What shall we do?" she sighed.

"Leave it to me," replied Ally. "Runnel is not known as one of us to the torpedo-men. We must play him against them."

Summoning the old ex-smuggler from the library, Ally instructed him briefly in the rôle now devolving upon him, and sent him to the door in time to meet the unwelcome visitor.

"Well, who are you?" demanded Quigley, halting abruptly a few yards from the door, as his gaze rested upon the perfectly unknown figure which had loomed up to his view.

"You don't know me then, Quigley, quite as well as I know you, do you?" was the smiling response of Runnel. "Have you hitched up the horses? If so, you were to leave them on the floor. You understood the matter, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Quigley, with mingled hesitation and suspicion. "That isn't what troubles me. May I ask who you are?"

"Certainly. My name is Paul Radwill. I'm a brother of Riloff, and I'm here to accompany my brother in the probable voyage to the West Indies, or elsewhere, of which he has said so much to you."

This somewhat hazardous explanation just met the requirements of the situation.

The corrugated brows of Quigley smoothed out as if by magic.

"It's all right, Mr. Radwill," he said. "I didn't know Mr. Riloff had a brother; but I can see that you are high enough up in his confidence to be one. I came here because Crawley has got the notion that the whole place is full of detectives."

"Been drinking, hasn't he?"

"No, sir—not to speak of. But he was just telling me that there is some monkey going on, and that the first thing we know we shall all be in prison."

"Indeed!" commented Runnel. "Tell him he must stop drinking, or he'll have the jim-jams."

"The fact is, Crawley fancies there's something wrong going on here. He has heard from below that Mrs. Weatherbee has escaped."

"There is some basis for that report," avowed Runnel, with apparent frankness. "Mrs. Weatherbee has been brought up here to be in readiness for the proposed journey."

"Oh, that is it? Is she here?"

The ex-smuggler assented.

"A prisoner?"

"As much in our hands as she ever was," assured Runnel. "If you would like to see her, so as to assure Crawley how mistaken he is—"

"Oh, it's unnecessary."

"But I insist," pursued Runnel, catching a gesture to this effect from Ally, who stood just within the door. "I wish you to take notice that she is bound, helpless and unconscious, in the reception-room, and if that doesn't render her a prisoner, what can?"

"I should say as much," declared Quigley.

"Now we don't want Crawley to have any misgivings on the subject," continued Runnel, "and for that reason, and that alone, you had better step in and take a glance at the lady. What you see with your own eyes, you know, that you can swear to."

He slowly led the way to the entrance of the reception-room, having given the lady and the young detectives ample time to simulate the situation announced.

One glance was enough.

"To be sure," acknowledged Quigley, as he retreated to the door. "Can I see Mr. Riloff?"

"He has lain down for a nap, having been up all night, as you know," explained Runnel. "Nevertheless, if it's anything important, I can wake him up—"

He took a step toward the library, as if to give effect to the visitor's wishes, but the latter hastily interposed.

"Not for the world," he exclaimed. "All I have to say can be said later."

"I understand the case, Quigley," declared Runnel, with apparent sympathy. "You've been fretted a good deal during the last few days and are nervous. Let me bring you a drink of my brother's favorite brandy, and send the balance of the bottle to Crawley, with a recommend that you take a good nap, both of you, during the next two hours."

He hastened to act upon this proposition, pouring out for Quigley a dram of such size as to command his unqualified satisfaction.

"Even if it goes to your head a little, Quigley," added Runnel confidentially, "you mustn't breathe a word about that money my brother has just been hiding. Not a word about that, Quigley."

"I understand," returned Quigley, as he raised his brandy to his lips with one hand, while he offered the other to his new acquaintance. "I see that you're true blue. You have all the old man's secrets. You're just what you claim to be. I'll say as much to Crawley."

"All right," said Runnel. "By the way, you may as well bring the horses to the door, and then we shall not need to come near the stable for several hours, and you and Crawley can get the sleep you both need. Comprehend?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Radwill."

"Fact is," added Runnel, his air becoming

still more confidential, "I think of driving over to Yawilton, to send a number of messages. Mr. Riloff has about decided to secure a new fast steam-yacht which has been offered him for a trifle. In any case, bring the horses to the door."

"I'll have 'em here in a jiffy, sir," assured Quigley, touching his hat politely. "And glad enough I am, sir, that Crawley's mistaken."

He turned and retired at a rapid pace, while Runnel proceeded to the reception-room.

"You're a born diplomat, Runnel," declared Ally, with hearty voice and mien, as he offered his hand. "I did not expect you to weave the few hints I gave you into such a remarkable web."

"Oh, I haven't run the coast-guard a score of years for nothing," returned the old ex-smuggler contentedly. "I can tell a good story when I have half a chance. I believe I got in all the material facts, even to bringing the horses."

"Yes, you did. Remain here to receive the team and get rid of Quigley, and we'll then decide upon our course."

Little had been said or done until the horses had been brought and Quigley had departed, and then the quartette resolved themselves into a special committee of ways and means.

"The first thing to be thought of is your safety, Mrs. Weatherbee," said Ally thoughtfully. "Are you strong enough to ride twelve or fifteen miles?"

"To the end of the world, Mr. Webber," replied the lady, with glowing eyes and features, "if such a journey is required to take me back to my husband. You have not yet telegraphed him that you have found me?"

"No, madam. We'll do that as we pass through Yawilton, the nearest telegraph station. I have already given you just a hint of my installation at Foreland Manor, and my suggestion is that you accept my hospitality until the arrival of Mr. Weatherbee."

"Many thanks, Mr. Webber," said the lady. "I accept with the greatest pleasure. But what is to be done with Riloff?"

"Mark and I have hardly settled that point," responded Ally, "but Mark thinks that he and Runnel had better remain here until you are safe at Foreland Manor, and my boat has got back here. He undertakes to hold this place, and retain Riloff a prisoner, until these two movements have been executed. We have arranged with Crawley and Quigley to spend the morning in sleep, and I dare say it will be easy for Mark and his capable assistant to meet all perils that may come from the Grotto or any other source."

"We can at least make the attempt," declared Mark, "and if the worst comes we can make our escape upon a couple of horses still remaining in Riloff's stable."

"A good thought," commented Ally. "Don't forget to bear it in mind. It is settled, then? You and Runnel will remain?"

"Yes, Ally."

"Well, I can't advise you to the contrary, for I know you are capable of extraordinary things, and your presence here is very desirable in a dozen ways. For instance, I believe that missing chief of police is somewhere in this house or in the Grotto. Having Quigley under your hand, you can always find out from him where Riloff has hidden his money. If necessary, you can force Riloff himself to give you any sort of an order, communication, or what not. Your point is to lull all the torpedo-men into fancied security, and let them have a good time in the Grotto till I can get the Water Witch down here to destroy their Little Tiger. One of the first things I am going to do is to telegraph to Annapolis for a ship-of-war to sail down the bay to-day and cut off the flight of these miscreants seaward. In a word, Mark, if you can hold the manor during the day, with the aid of Runnel, I'll take care of all the rest."

"Depend upon me, old fellow," returned Mark, with all the dogged energy of which Ally knew him capable. "And now be off with Mrs. Weatherbee! I shall not really breathe until I see you safely started for Foreland Manor!"

The lady flashed upon him a look of admiration and gratitude.

"I see that I have only to resign myself to your kind care," she said, gaining her feet with vigorous promptitude and offering Mark her hand. "Good-by for the present, Mr. Sherburne! I am sure I shall soon see you again."

"No doubt of it—no doubt!"

And Mark pressed her hand to his lips.

"And you, Mr. Runnel," and the lady shook hands with the old ex-smuggler. "Be sure I shall not forget you."

"Come, then," said Ally, drawing the arm of Mrs. Weatherbee within his own and exchanging a hearty grasp with his allies. "Having Riloff in your hands, don't hesitate to make him say and do anything necessary for the success of our schemes or for your safety. I leave you all the more readily because I will soon reinforce you with Captain Drake and his men, and because, the case arising, you will have good horses at your disposal."

"All is quiet at the stable," said Runnel, who had stolen a glance from the window. "You

will not even be seen as you take your departure."

Helping Mrs. Weatherbee into the waiting carriage Ally took his place by her side, drawing the top over their heads, and in another moment, with a few final suggestions and greetings, they drove quietly away in the direction of the pike skirting the shore.

Two minutes more, and they were safely leaving the manor of Riloff behind them.

"Such a relief!" breathed Mrs. Weatherbee, with a long sigh. "I feel as if I were passing from death to life. See! the sun is just rising! What a glorious augury it is for me!"

Ally joyfully assented.

"Words cannot tell you, Mr. Webber, how that man has tortured me!" she resumed, as if speaking were a positive relief to her long pent-up feelings. "One of his demands was that I should write a letter to my husband asking him to bring a hundred thousand dollars for my ransom! What he wanted was to get the money and my husband, too!"

"Have you learned who and what this man really is, Mrs. Weatherbee?"

"Oh, his identity has not been a secret since the first day of my captivity," declared the lady. "Let me tell you about him as we ride along here in the light of this beautiful morning. His real name is Abner Radwill—"

"Ah! he is really Radwill?"

"Yes. Of course my husband has given you an idea of the man. Twenty years ago he was a clerk in Mr. Weatherbee's employ. He came well recommended, but we never liked him, and my husband intended only to make a convenience of him during a temporary pressure of business. But during this short interval Radwill managed to lay hands upon several thousand dollars. He was on his way to New York with tickets in his pockets for Europe when arrested. He was duly tried and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment—six years, I think!"

"He had demanded, I believe, that both you and Mr. Weatherbee should refrain from appearing against him?" observed Ally.

"Yes. Even after his sentence he had the impudence to ask that Mr. Weatherbee and I should intercede with the governor for him. The very day thereafter he made his escape with several others from the jail. It is thought that he and another prisoner bribed one of the jailers. He was tracked and pursued, and then came the report that he had broken through the ice in attempting to cross the arm of a river and had been carried under and drowned. For years Mr. Weatherbee and I accepted this report as a fact, not having even a doubt of it."

"It was not till after the loss of your daughter, was it, that you doubted Radwill's death?" asked Ally.

"No—not till some time after," and the lady sighed wearily. "But when that doubt did come, it came to stay! It has been the one long torture of my life!"

"Of course Mr. Weatherbee does not know how you came to go away with the pretended clergyman so readily, on the day of your disappearance, three months ago," said Ally. "My explanation to him was that the bogus clergyman gave you some great hope of your daughter's continued existence and of recovering her—"

"The very thing!" cried the lady, turning startled glances upon him. "The pretended clergyman, as I have learned from Riloff, was a certain Captain Maddler, dressed up and instructed for the occasion. He drove me to a boat he had in waiting, rendering me insensible with chloroform as we drove through the streets, and the next thing I knew I was a prisoner in that dungeon from which you have so bravely released me. But to come back to the secret of my sudden fall into the terrible trap these men set for me. The pretended clergyman not only assured me that my daughter lived, and that he had brought her to the Monument House, where she was waiting to see me, but he also brought me a photograph—you understand, Mr. Webber, an actual photograph—which I know to the very depths of my soul had been taken within a few months from the face of my lost darling!"

The poor mother finished with a wail of agony to which no language can give adequate expression, and hurriedly continued:

"Yes, Mr. Webber, that terrible impostor brought me a portrait of my darling Florrie, as she now appears, after all the years of anguish which have rolled over my head! I know, therefore, that she lives. She is in the hands of this pretended Russian, otherwise Radwill. He has affirmed as much to me within three days past! He even says he's going to give her in marriage to one of his favorite scoundrels! Oh, God! where is she?"

"I know, my dear Mrs. Weatherbee," answered Ally, very gently, as he turned his manly face toward her, with bright tear-drops upon it.

The lady gasped for breath.

"You—you know?" she faltered, her soul in her eyes, and her hand clutching his arm with the vigor of a vise.

"I know, I say! Better still, she has found

a deliverer, a champion—one who would wade through any possible seas of tribulation to serve her and her mother—"

"Oh, you have found her—you, Ally Webber!"

"Yes, I have found her, and she's safe in my hands at this moment, as safe as you are! The Great Hand has guided us!"

The sorrowing mother gazed into his face and eyes as if entranced.

"Is it—is it not possible that there is some dreadful mistake?" she faltered.

"Not a bit of it—not a bit of it!" assured Ally, cheerily, as he dashed from his eyes the tears which had invaded them. "If you will be brave—if you will not make any outcry to scare the horses," and he smiled with a gentle sweetness which fascinated the mother-heart, besides soothing it indescribably, "I will now show you the very counterpart of the picture that pretended clergyman exhibited to you in Baltimore!"

"Oh, if it were possible?" murmured Mrs. Weatherbee, her eyes following every movement of Ally's hand, as he directed it into his capacious side-pocket. "And why not? I know that you are capable of achieving wonders. I have great faith in you. I see that you are in earnest. Do not fear for me. I will be perfectly quiet! Show me my darling's picture!"

"I will. But mind, now! No more fainting, you know! Why, in a few hours more you are to have the glorious original of this picture for all the rest of your life! You see what reasons you have to be brave! Here she is! Isn't she charming? There!"

And he produced his copy of Olga's photograph, placing it under the gaze of the sorely-tried and sorrowing mother.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SCHEMES OF THE RIVALS.

In a creek near Foreland Manor lay a small sailboat, which had been secured to trees on the shore by a couple of lines.

The sail had been lowered without being furled, and the mast, instead of being unstepped, had been cleverly dissimulated by a number of green bushes, which had been lashed to it by a single rope wound spirally, so that the simple loosening of a knot at the bottom would instantly allow them all to fall into the boat.

Beneath the loose sail in the bottom of the boat lay a couple of men who were sleeping with the soundness of exhaustion.

It is hardly necessary to say that they were Major Becker and Captain Maddler.

Upon a stone wall near the boat sat Henner, the major's "man," quietly enjoying his substitute for a breakfast, having a large piece of boiled corned beef in one hand and a corresponding piece of bread in the other.

While his mood was strangely preoccupied, he was as watchful as an eagle, or as the bravest beast of prey.

"Of course they'd sleep forever if I allowed 'em to," he muttered, with a glance at the newly-risen sun. "But my idea is to secure the girl first, and rest afterward."

He hesitated a moment only, and then went to the boat, and shook the sleepers vigorously, one with each hand.

"What's up?" asked the major, starting violently and opening his eyes. "Are we there?"

"Yes, sir, we have arrived," answered Henner, "and I've already made fast."

Becker looked around discontentedly, noting the earliness of the hour, and there was an expression of annoyance on his face, as he responded:

"Well, why didn't you let me sleep? We shall not be able to do anything at present. The girl will be out of our reach for long hours to come."

Henner shook his head energetically.

"You do not appear to know Miss Olga as well as I do," he said. "She has always been an 'early bird.' As a rule, she is the first one up at the manor. And now that she is in a new scene—at the home of the young man who has made such an impression upon her—you may be sure she will not be slow to take a look around her. Ten to one she will avail herself of the cool morning for a stroll over Foreland Manor, and will sleep later."

"By Jupiter! there's something in what you say, Henner," returned the major, with an injustice as deep as sudden. "We must heed your suggestion."

He surveyed the shores before him a few moments, and then his eyes came back to the figure of Captain Maddler, who was sleeping as soundly as ever.

"Of course," and he made a gesture of caution, as he indicated his rival, "you comprehend that you are in my employ, not in his!"

"Certainly, sir."

"It is understood, too, that you will obey me in every particular and pay no heed to any orders to the contrary from him?"

"That's understood, sir," assured Henner. "It's hardly necessary to add that I work for the man who pays me."

"That's a sensible way in which to look at it," declared the major, smilingly. "Should there

be any row about the girl, therefore—any little difference of opinion—you will stick to me?"

"It is useless to ask such a question, sir," returned Henner. "You can always depend upon me to obey your directions in every particular."

"Good. That's the very answer I expected from you," commented the major, with an air of relief and contentment. "You may now awaken the captain, and we'll carry out your suggestion—"

"Which is to get hold of the girl and get away with her in the course of the next half-hour, even if we have to scale the old rookery on the bluff to get her!" explained Henner, with an energy which would have suggested to an observant hearer that he had a personal interest in the game. "Every minute you idle away in this neighborhood will be a minute lost."

Assenting to this view of the case, Becker ordered his man by a gesture to wake up Madder, and proceeded to set forth to his rival the value of prompt action.

"Thus far," concluded the major, "Henner is the only one of us who has been seen from the shore, as we have slept all the way up the coast. Hence the boat cannot have possibly awakened the least curiosity, still less apprehension, if Olga or any one else has seen it. If the worst comes, too, we'll burst into the house and carry the girl off. We're strong-handed enough for the task. There must be no delay about it."

Captain Madder assented quite readily to these representations, and hastened to lead the way ashore, ascending the easy slope which led toward the rear of Foreland Manor.

Their path proving to be shady, and the morning breezes delightful, the walk was a pleasant one to the rivals, irrespective of the villainous hopes and aims which had occasioned it.

They had not gone far before Becker clutched the captain's arm, whispering that he had caught a glimpse of the girl already.

"Yes, there she is," he declared, placing his rival at the spot he had just quitted. "There, I cannot exactly make her out, as her back is toward us, and there is a wall of bushes between her and us, but who else can it be? Let's get nearer."

"Agreed, but don't be too hasty. 'The more haste the less speed,' you know. No doubt she is the prize we are seeking."

Stealing nearer and nearer, the couple at length arrived near enough for the snapping of a twig under the major's foot to betray their presence.

Gaining her feet with the abrupt vigor of a sudden apprehension, the object of their remarks turned and bestowed a keen glance upon them.

"Thunder! it's Mrs. Arbuckle."

He would have gladly retreated without a word, but the fugitive housekeeper was not to be got rid of so easily.

"Ah, it's you, gentlemen?" she cried, as she advanced to meet them. "Need I say that your presence here is a surprise?"

"I seem to be dreaming," returned the major, advancing and shaking the hand offered him. "What on earth can you be doing at Foreland Manor?"

This question was in itself enough to tell the housekeeper that the two men were ignorant of her flight, or its motives, and she at once dismissed the vague sense of apprehension and insecurity the sight of them had caused her.

"You are not here in Olga's company, are you?" continued Becker, scanning her features for the explanation of the situation.

"Here with Olga?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that Olga is at Foreland Manor?"

"That's just how the case stands," declared Madder.

"Then she must have come here after I had retired for the night," declared the housekeeper. "Even now I cannot realize what you tell me."

"Well, it happened this way," said Becker, pressing the arm of his companion significantly.

"We were out for a sail with Olga last evening, and were caught in one of the most persistent calms we have ever known in the bay. Don't you think it was, captain?"

"I do indeed," replied Madder, readily taking the cue from his rival.

"We accordingly landed Olga here at a late hour, with the understanding that she would come back to the boat at sunrise."

"Oh, I understand now," said Mrs. Arbuckle. She really thought she did.

"I am not unmindful of the attentions you have both endeavored to bestow upon that girl," she resumed, "and I cannot be so cruel as to say that I blame you. The only thing I wonder at is to see you two 'dwelling together' in such 'peace and harmony.' You are wiser than I supposed."

"Oh, we're not going to quarrel about her," declared the major, with a smile. "A more likely outcome of the situation is that the girl will not accept either of us. But all this is foreign to the subject in hand," and the major looked at his watch. "As you see, Olga has overslept herself, as is natural enough, considering the lateness of the hour at which we arrived, and there's no telling when she will appear, if we leave 'tired nature' to its course.

Will you have the goodness, therefore, Mrs. Arbuckle, to pay Olga a visit, as promptly as you can, and convey to her our wishes?"

"With pleasure," replied the housekeeper.

She was not a great friend or admirer of either of these men, but she was keenly alive to her own fugitive situation, and she fancied it would be a wise thing to place them under obligations to her.

"Please not mention our names, as the circumstances under which we came here are somewhat peculiar," said Becker, "and we do not want Olga to even become a subject of gossip. You will simply say that you have had a chat with the friends who brought her here, and that they are very anxious to see her as soon as possible, the more especially as something very important has happened—something that deeply concerns her!"

Mrs. Arbuckle had never liked Olga, and had never been a real friend to her. There were times even when she felt as if she hated her—as if she could almost commit a crime to be rid of her forever. From a mere girl, Olga had readily been able to read the character of the unscrupulous and vicious housekeeper, and this very circumstance had made the latter ill-disposed.

Nevertheless, it was rather with the idea of doing the two men a favor than of doing any harm to Olga that the woman hastened to reply:

"I can do what you ask as well as not. I can see that there is some mystery in the matter, and that you have prepared a little surprise for the girl, but I comprehend that you are not here without Mr. Riloff's knowledge and approbation, and hence I am not disposed to be too critical. You will wait here for me, I suppose?"

"Yes—here or hereabouts," said Becker. "We shall depend upon you to find reasons to insure the girl's presence. Do not come without her. In return for your kindness, our hands and pockets will always be at your disposal. It's a bargain, is it not?"

"Of course it is, major," answered Mrs. Arbuckle, with a smile she emitted only periodically, and of which very few of her acquaintances had ever received samples. "Depend upon me, major! I will return to this spot with the girl as soon as I can!"

Nodding a transient adieu, she turned away and began ascending the slope at a fair pace, quickly vanishing behind intervening trees and bushes in the direction of the dwelling.

"The old she-wolf!" muttered the major.

"The toothless salamander!" ejaculated Madder.

"Will she come back?" resumed Becker, as he continued to look in the direction the housekeeper had taken.

"And will she bring the girl with her?" demanded the captain. "Weighty problems! We shall have to possess our souls with what patience we can, and wait to see what the old creature will give us!"

For a long time the couple continued to watch in silence.

"An idea strikes me," then said the major. "It would be well to plant ourselves a little nearer the house. We shall be all the surer of success by so doing!"

"That's true," returned Madder. "Even if she should come without hesitation or suspicion, we can drop upon her trail more promptly and follow her seaward, thus cutting off all chance of escape. Let's hide ourselves in that clump of bushes yonder," he proposed, indicating by a wave of the hand the spot which had attracted his attention. "The place is a good one, from every point of view."

They lost no time in seeking the concealment in question, and then followed another long and anxious interval of waiting.

Both men at length began to be apprehensive of the failure of their project.

"Clearly enough, she isn't coming!" muttered Becker, losing color as well as patience.

"No, major. That old grimalkin has made a muddle of the whole matter."

"What fools we are! We ought to have known better than to give ourselves away to such a specimen of anatomy!" supplemented Becker.

"We may as well go," declared Madder.

"And the question now is—"

"Hush! here they come!"

How they watched and listened!

The voice of Mrs. Arbuckle had begun to resound on their hearing, and this very fact was enough to show that she was not alone.

A few moments more, and the gaze of the two men fell upon the face and form of Olga, as she walked beside the old housekeeper, all unsuspecting of evil.

Their joy became infernal!

They already assured themselves that she could not escape!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE "DARK HORSE" IN THE CASE BRIGHT and sparkling as the morning itself, Olga had never appeared to her infatuated admirers as charming as she did at that moment. As was simply inevitable, the old housekeeper

had readily learned from Olga's questions and remarks that she had not come to Foreland Manor with Madder and Becker, but this discovery made no difference with the unprincipled woman.

Her curiosity having been aroused, she was willing to play her decoy game to the end.

"Are we not going wrong?" suddenly asked the maiden, looking around keenly.

"How going wrong?"

"Why, I didn't land here, but on the other side of the house."

At least half a mile from the spot where she now found herself, she might have added.

The question sufficed to give point to the nervousness of the watchers, who lost no time in emerging from their concealment and placing themselves between the manor and their intended victim.

It was some time before Olga chanced to look back. In fact, the party had nearly reached the shore of the creek where the sail-boat was lying. At sight of the couple sauntering in her footsteps the maiden halted abruptly, a sudden pallor appearing on her features.

"You have deceived me, Mrs. Arbuckle," she said, reproachfully. "You have not seen Captain Drake at all. You know very well that these men are my enemies. They're here for no good purpose."

She turned to retrace her steps, deviating to one side of the path by which she had come, but the movement was quickly met by a corresponding action on the part of the intruders, whose sinister design thus became apparent.

"Not so fast, charming Olga," greeted Becker, with airy insolence. "Surely you cannot intend to give us the slip without so much as saying good-morning."

"The more especially as we are here with the knowledge and consent of Mr. Riloff," exclaimed Madder, with a jocular air of triumph.

Olga came to a halt, for the simple reason that the ruffians had planted themselves directly in her path. Her pallor gave place to an angry flush. She was resolutely scornful.

"It matters little to me whether you are Mr. Riloff's friends or not," she said. "You are certainly not mine! All I ask of you is to get out of my path. That wretched woman has evidently undertaken the task of betraying me into your hands; but you'll find me no easy prey."

"What woman?" asked Becker, jauntily.

The girl looked around.

Mrs. Arbuckle had hastily set about retracing her steps, and had already vanished from view behind sundry intervening bushes.

The situation goaded Olga, and she made a prompt effort to place herself beyond the two villains, but both changed their places so quickly that the attempt was not successful. They even closed in upon her, their hands ready to seize her.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked, sternly, her haughty scorn flashing from her eyes.

"We want you," replied Becker.

"And we are bound to have you," confirmed Madder, with a sweep of his arm to indicate the surrounding solitude.

"Hunting in couples, eh?" sneered Olga.

"Any sort of hunting is legitimate when you are its object," pursued Becker, with a revengeful gleam in his eyes. "We are here to carry you off to a new home we have selected for you."

"Indeed! I decline to go!"

"Then we shall be compelled to resort to gentle but sufficient violence. Eh, captain?"

"We certainly shall," avowed Madder.

The maiden was more amazed than intimidated by these declarations.

"A funny state of affairs," she commented.

"This is the first time I have ever known two rejected suitors to put their heads and hands together to achieve a triumph over the object of their attentions!"

"True, Olga. Decidedly original, novel, and all that, isn't it?" asked the major.

"So much so that I marvel your 'dull pates' have ever conceived anything so wonderful!"

"To be candid, the suggestion came from Mr. Riloff," avowed Madder. "He thought it a pity that we should both lose you. But we are wasting valuable time. The fact is just as we have stated, Olga. We are here to carry you off!"

"May I ask, whither?"

"Certainly. We are going to rusticate at the Creswell mansion, not far up the Lock River. I see from your manner that you've heard of this place. We shall speedily come to an understanding there!"

"In any case, we shall keep you there until you choose between us," confirmed Becker.

"The question now is, will you go quietly? Or shall we be obliged to gag and bind you?"

The maiden looked from one to the other more scornfully than ever.

She realized that they would hesitate at nothing—absolutely nothing—and she shrunk from intensifying their brutality by a vain resistance.

"If you'd like to call for assistance, we have no objections," added Becker. "A few screams more or less in this solitude would have no ad-

preciable effect upon the situation. Tune up, as much as you like, only be prompt about it. Time is precious. We're in a hurry!"

A comprehensive glance around her told Olga that help could not be had by screaming.

Positively, there was not a soul in sight.

Captain Drake and his men were not stirring at that hour, and if they were, they were on the other side of the Foreland peninsula.

"You're to follow Becker," said Madder, with an imperative gesture. "I will bring up the rear!"

The maiden resigned herself to the inevitable, and resumed her course toward the creek, following the route indicated, one of her enemies taking the lead and the other hovering upon her footsteps.

She made no further remark.

Her resolve was to reserve her strength and energy for a more favorable occasion.

The boat was soon reached, and Becker led the way into it, Madder following only after Olga had seated herself.

Henner then appeared from the adjacent bushes to cast off the craft, and the captive realized that her jailers were three in number.

Another minute, and the boat was standing out of the creek into the bay.

Seating himself astern, Becker handled the tiller, while Madder busied himself with the sheet and sail, and Henner assisted the rivals to the best substitute for breakfast the boat afforded.

All three of them watched Olga, as a cat watches its prey.

For nearly an hour little was said, but there was much thinking.

It was with a tremor of anguish that the captive at length remarked that Foreland Manor had wholly vanished from view.

"We're getting on, you see," remarked Madder, with increased malignancy and triumph, as he marked the girl's change of countenance. "You'll soon be where your dear Webber will never find you!"

A thrust from a knife would not have pained the girl more.

How her soul called for Ally!

Yet she would not let her tormentors see how much she was tortured.

She aroused herself to talk for the sake of concealing her thoughts, or changing their tenor.

"I am still wondering what is to be the outcome of this proceeding," she observed, looking from one to the other. "I have no difficulty in seeing that you are as much rivals as ever!"

"Perhaps you'll choose between us," suggested Becker, with a covert glance at Madder.

"I? Never!" answered Olga, as spirited as ever. "I'd as soon choose between two wolves threatening to devour me!"

"Then we may have to draw lots," pursued the major. "The choice, however, can matter little to you. One of us is bound to win."

"I trust I shall be that one, Olga," said Madder, insinuatingly. "You know how long and ardently I have loved you. Why not decide now and here in my favor?"

This appeal annoyed Becker.

He experienced a fear that the girl might be driven by the very terrors of her situation to accept his odious rival.

"There'll be ample time to decide the question, Olga," declared Becker, employing the insinuating manner of his rival. "You need not be in a hurry!"

Captain Madder flushed angrily.

"You need not interfere with me, major," he exclaimed. "If the girl chooses to accept me on the spot, it is not for you to find fault with her choice!"

Olga did not dare look at either of her suitors, much less utter another word, so keenly had she realized how easy and how natural it was for them to quarrel.

She had even conceived a sudden apprehension of trouble, not merely from the rivals, but from Henner, who had seated himself in the shadow of the sail and was regarding her with strangely burning glances when not dividing them between Becker and Madder.

"When I want you to lecture me, Captain Madder," cried the major, pale with suppressed wrath, "I'll hire a hall and make arrangements for a regular course! If the girl wants you, let her say so. But I'm sure she don't!"

"And I'm sure she'll never accept you, however gently or fiercely you may woo her," declared the captain. "No doubt she has spoken at least sixteen times to that effect already!"

This allusion to his many rejections was too much for the major's patience.

"Do you mean to insult me?" he cried, in a towering passion, as he sprung to his feet. "If so, take that!"

A report succeeded, and a ball from Becker's revolver traversed Madder's vitals.

"Ha! that's your game, eh?" cried Madder, as he drew his own weapon. "It takes two to play it!"

It was in vain that a wild shriek of mingled terror and reprobation rung out from the lips of our heroine. Even as he sunk inert and pow-

erless in the bottom of the boat, a second report resounded, and Becker tottered and fell, with the ball of his adversary in his backbone after having traversed his body.

"Curse him! I fear he has done for me!" exclaimed Becker, as he vainly tried to recover his footing. "Quick, Henner! throw that carrion overboard!"

The command was obeyed with all the promptness the most exacting master could have desired. There was still considerable fight in Madder and he came very near doing for the "man" what he had done for the master, but he was just a moment too late in calling into play his rapidly waning forces, and the next instant he vanished over the side of the boat, sinking like lead.

"A good job," cried Becker, who did not yet realize how badly he had been wounded. "Bear a hand here a moment, Henner."

"As soon as I've eased off the sheet, sir," was the response of Henner, who had not allowed anything to escape him. "We don't want to be capsized, you know!"

He waited until the boat was rocking safely, if disagreeably, with its sail flapping, and then stepped past the motionless figure of Olga, who had fainted, and knelt beside his master.

"Are you hurt, major?" he asked.

"Very seriously, I fear! Give me a drop of brandy!"

"What you want is water, major, and plenty of it," returned Henner, grimly, as he laid violent hands upon his master. "Over you go! I'm bound to be rid of both of you!"

"Monster! what would you do?" gasped Becker, as he feebly essayed resistance to the awful treachery of which he found himself the victim. "Spare me! Murder!"

Unheeded were his cries, in vain all his struggles! The strong hands of Henner did not for an instant relax or falter as they raised the bloody figure of Major Becker and threw it overboard, nor did the gleaming eyes of the murderer once quail as they continued to watch the death-struggles of the victim until he, too, had vanished into the depths of the bay.

"Poor fools!" he then muttered, with a fiendish outburst of triumph which flamed alike from his eyes and features. "How little did they realize that they were planning and toiling for me! I, too, have long had my eyes upon the girl, but I knew how to attain my end precisely as the crab attains his—by advancing sideways to it."

Producing a sponge and a small bucket from under the seat in the stern of the boat, he proceeded to remove all traces of the tragedy, making use of some powerful acid he had provided beforehand to remove the blood-stains. This task accomplished to his satisfaction, he set his sail, took his place at the tiller, and laid the course of his boat anew in the direction it had previously been steering.

"They're gone forever," he muttered, after a long and careful survey of the surface of the waters around him, "and no one has seen them vanish! Not a soul's in sight. I'm peacefully and fully in possession. I'm master of the situation. All I have to do is to complete the work as successfully as I have begun it."

He gave his best attention to his boat, bestowing scarcely a glance upon Olga, and paying no heed to the moans that came from her. He knew she would soon be conscious again, without any aid from him, and his idea was to make all possible progress toward his destination.

At the end of half an hour, or thereabouts, Olga opened her eyes.

"Is it—is it a dream?" she faltered.

"Not much," answered Henner, quietly, as he hauled aft his sheet and tiller.

His voice was quite sufficient to complete Olga's restoration to consciousness.

She gained her feet, with a startled glance around, and resumed her seat.

"Where's Becker?" she asked.

"He's been killed by Madder."

"And Madder—"

"Oh, he's been killed by Becker!"

"Horrible! horrible! And you—and you—"

"I threw them overboard, as a simple matter of sanitary precaution."

"But they were not dead."

"No, but they were mortally wounded, and would have suffered untold miseries if I hadn't been thoughtful enough to slip them overboard!"

"Merciful heavens!" ejaculated Olga. "Who and what are you?"

"I? I am simply the 'dark horse' of the occasion!—the unknown nobody who comes to the front at just the right moment to reap the splendid harvest somebody else has sown. I have long admired you from a distance, Miss Olga, without being so weak as to persecute you unreasonably with a knowledge of my sentiments. It was very kind of Becker and Madder to open the road for me, I'm sure, and I shall always hold them in grateful remembrance. As they're out of the field, there's a chance for me to come in!"

It was with a strange, new terror that Olga surveyed his ignoble form and features.

"Will you take me back to Foreland Manor?" she asked.

"No, I won't," he answered, without the least attempt to soften his refusal.

"Not if I pay you well—"

"All the gold and silver in the world couldn't hire me to do such a thing," he declared, as his baleful glance settled upon her. "I'm the natural heir of those two men who have gone to the fishes! You are mine, Miss Olga—mine!"

The captive could neither threaten, beg or protest.

She was appalled by the sinister menace of the gaze fixed upon her.

CHAPTER XXX.

BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR.

In the mean time, what gladness had come to Mrs. Weatherbee, as she rode with Ally Webber along the shore road, in the light of that beautiful summer morning!

She had realized that the young detective told her the exact truth when he promised to show her a counterpart of the photograph which had rendered her, three months before, such an easy prey of the emissary of Riloff.

A single glance at the picture he had produced, as related, was enough to make an end of all her doubts and uncertainties forever.

It was indeed the portrait of her lost darling. She lived. She had been found. Ally knew where she was. She was safe in his care! What a glorious, glad situation! What relief for the sorrowing and desolate mother!

"Yes, she is Florrie," she murmured, in tones of exquisite tenderness, as she pressed the picture to her lips rapturously, with tears of joy in her eyes. "At last! at last! Heaven has heard my prayers. The agony of long years is ended. My daughter is restored to me, and I am even now on my way to see her!"

"Did I not tell you so?" cried Ally, his own eyes radiant with tears of gladness and sympathy. "I KNEW there could be no mistake about it."

"And to thank what you have done—you a mere boy—where so many others have failed," proceeded Mrs. Weatherbee, as she turned her tear-gemmed eyes upon our hero. "How shall I ever thank you? How express the gratefulness which must henceforth fill my heart as long as it shall beat?"

Half-turning in her seat, she caught the brave youth in her arms, as if she already divined all his truth, goodness and devotion, and kissed him again and again.

"You have indeed given me a duplicate of the photograph shown me by that pretended Mr. Turner," she added, as she again held it up to her view, her eyes clinging to it as if fascinated. "How did you come by it?"

"Olga herself gave it to me."

The young hero blushed as fervently as any girl could have done, and added:

"As my own—to keep."

"Oh, she did!" and the joy-lit eyes of Mrs. Weatherbee ran over his tell-tale face, reading his secret. "You are getting along fast. I dare say she calls you Ally already."

"I—I cannot deny it."

"Why, it will read like a fairy-tale, will it not, Ally? You save the dear girl and restore her to her parents, falling in love with her at the same time, and so you are married in due course and live happy ever afterward. A regular fairy-tale, is it not, Ally?"

"Oh, such a joyful, glorious one!" he responded, venturing to give way to his delicious sensations, venturing to accept all. The wild joy and enthusiasm of the moment. "I—I could not help falling in love with Olga from the first moment I saw her. She has such charming eyes! such a sweet mouth! such lovely features! such a musical voice! It wasn't my intention at all—I cannot tell just how such a state of things has arisen. I must have simply looked and loved."

"Oh, that's easily seen," commented Mrs. Weatherbee, with a voice more deferential and tender than ever, as she scanned admiringly the manly features of the youth the march of events was offering her as a son-in-law. "And not in vain, it seems."

"Well, I think she cares a great deal for me," avowed Ally confidentially, "but there has been so much to think about—so much to do—that I really haven't had time to say much to her on this particular subject. Will you forgive me for falling in love with her so suddenly and unexpectedly?"

"I do not believe any forgiveness is needed, my dear Ally," answered Mrs. Weatherbee, with a smile and a mien which removed mountains from his susceptible soul. "We'll discuss the matter later—after we have consulted the dear girl whose word and wish will be law to us both. I will only say now that you can depend upon a very warm welcome from Mr. Weatherbee and myself, if we should be so fortunate as to secure a son with our daughter."

We will not attempt to describe the joy these thoughtful and kindly words caused the young hero.

The world appeared to him under quite as roseate hues as it did to the mother.

"It seems, then, that my darling Florrie is known as Olga," continued Mrs. Weatherbee. "Tell me all about her, beginning with the

moment of your arrival in this neighborhood. Is she known as Olga Riloff?"

"You've guessed it the first time trying—yes," answered Ally. "But she has long had doubts of being a Riloff, and had no difficulty whatever in accepting my declaration that she has a good mother and a nice home elsewhere!"

"What! you have told her this already?"

"I stated these facts to her the first time I saw her!" declared Ally. "As a simple matter of fact, I recognized at a glance how much she is like you! All the facts of her surroundings, too, pointed to her identity. You should have seen how she was touched and delighted with your photograph and that of Mr. Weatherbee! But let me tell you, in detail, all about it. There is ample time for me to do so before we reach the village."

The story was soon told, the horses jogging steadily on their way, and it will readily be imagined how its various episodes thrilled and delighted the heart of the listener.

"We have reached the conclusion at the right moment, you see," added Ally, as he drew up in front of the telegraph-office. "I will send a few messages, and we'll then drive on to Foreland Manor."

The messages having been duly dispatched, the couple resumed their journey.

Without venturing to disturb the mother's joy with his anxieties concerning the proposed trip of Madder and Becker to his new home, Ally had nevertheless borne this peril in mind, and had taken good care not to lose a single moment.

Ere long, pushing forward rapidly, he reached an elevation from which he could see the quaint old buildings of Foreland Manor, and he pointed them out to his companion.

"As you see," he added, "we shall not be long now in arriving!"

"And to think what delight will so soon be mine!" exclaimed Mrs. Weatherbee. "I can hardly contain myself! Would that I could be taken up by some powerful agency and transported in a moment to your doorstep!"

Ally smiled appreciatively.

He quite shared the lady's impatience to arrive at the haven of her gladness.

The travelers had gone barely a couple of miles after leaving the village, and had relapsed into the silence which naturally characterizes a great expectancy, when Ally was startled by the sight of a feminine figure which was flying along the road toward him in an old farm-wagon.

This figure he soon made out to be Mrs. Gussett.

Her very attitude, not to speak of her movements, was portentous of calamity, and Ally grew pale as he watched her wild advance.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Weatherbee, remarking his sudden excitement.

"It's Mrs. Gussett, the old housekeeper I have retained at Foreland Manor. She looks like a ghost! What can have happened?"

He quickened his own speed, a dismal foreboding taking possession of his heart.

What could have happened, to make Mrs. Gussett hazard her life and limbs over the road in such furious fashion, except that the wolves Riloff had sent forth had already secured their prey!

"I fear the worst, Mrs. Weatherbee," he exclaimed, answering his own question. "Those rejected suitors of whom I was telling you—"

"Ah, you fear they have seized Florrie!" cried Mrs. Weatherbee, her face blanching suddenly.

"That's the only explanation I can give of this reckless pace," acknowledged Ally, his soul a prey to anxieties he could not avow.

He drew rein as Mrs. Gussett came bearing down upon him in such a flurry that she came very near leaving him unrecognized by the wayside?

"Where to, Mrs. Gussett?" he called, in such sharp, loud tones as to fix her attention and arrest her movements.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Webber?" she cried, drawing rein with dangerous abruptness. "Miss Olga has been carried off by two men, with the aid of that wretched Mrs. Arbuckle, to whom you kindly gave shelter."

The shock startled Mrs. Weatherbee into the utterance of such a wild scream of anguish, that the eyes of good Mrs. Gussett were at once fixed upon her in wondering amazement.

"The lady is Olga's mother, Mrs. Gussett," explained Ally, too bewildered to think of a more formal introduction. "Tell us all about it, and as briefly as you can."

"I'll tell you first where the villains have gone," declared Mrs. Gussett, with a grim satisfaction which showed that she was by no means hopelessly. "I was up early and went down toward the creek, saying nothing to nobody, to pick some blackberries, thinking how nice they'd be for Miss Olga's breakfast. Well, as good-luck would have it, I was near by in the bushes when the men met Olga, and heard all that was said. I had just all I could do to control my feelings and not show myself, or betray my presence, for I said to myself that the villains would carry me off, too, there being three

of them, and then poor Mr. Webber would know nothing whatever of the circumstances of Olga's disappearance. So I waited and waited, watching and listening, and I heard the men tell Olga that they should take her to the Creswell mansion."

"The Creswell mansion," echoed Mrs. Weatherbee, a ray of sudden hope traversing her soul at this definite detail.

"Yes, madam. It's a deserted house a few miles up the York River—a place said to be haunted, and which has not been inhabited, except at odd times, since the end of the war."

"Perhaps this mention is a blind, Mrs. Gussett," suggested Ally, anxiously.

"No, sir. The man was perfectly serious, and when the boat left—for the men carried Olga off in a boat—it steered in the very direction necessary to take it to the Creswell mansion."

"Thank God for this clew," cried Mrs. Weatherbee, as the blood began returning to her face. "It is providential! We shall be able to recover my daughter—I cannot, will not doubt it! This is merely the dark hour which always comes before dawn!"

"I agree with you," said Ally. "Quick, Mrs. Weatherbee. We must go back to the village, and send telegrams in every direction, after which we will drive as rapidly as possible to Creswell mansion. In the meantime, Mrs. Gussett," he added, turning to that lady, "you can go back to Foreland Manor at your leisure, and keep all snug there until our arrival."

Mrs. Weatherbee bowed assent to this disposition of affairs, and in another moment she and Ally were driving swiftly along the road by which they had come.

"You telegraphed Mr. Weatherbee, in the sense we decided upon?" asked the lady.

"I did, and of course that will bring him here this evening," replied Ally. "It was understood that he would take the fastest steam yacht in Baltimore and run down to me, at the least hint of good news. In view of the communications I sent him yesterday, I should not be at all surprised to see him turn up here this evening."

"What did you tell him?"

Ally briefly sketched the communications he had forwarded, and Mrs. Weatherbee smiled, as one who could readily judge of their effect upon her husband.

"Yes, he'll be here," she declared. "We may expect him at any moment. Don't fear for me," she added, as Ally made a movement to modify the pace of the horses. "My one thought is to overtake those villains! My one prayer is to rescue Florrie!"

"They've a little the advantage, as they're on the other side of the Foreland," mused Ally aloud, "but their start is not a long one, and we shall be able to swoop down upon them by the time they reach Creswell mansion. Like you, Mrs. Weatherbee, I cannot, will not accept for a moment the notion that those ruffians are to get away with Florrie to any distance, or for any time. We'll soon have them!"

And on they sped like the wind.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LIVELY TIMES AT RILOFF'S.

THE old ex-smuggler had barely finished a hurried breakfast, after the departure of Mrs. Weatherbee and Ally, when Mark returned from the library, where Riloff was still a close prisoner.

"I've fed the old sinner," announced Mark, "although I would have much preferred to carry out your suggestion and feed him to the fishes! He hated very much to have the gag restored to his mouth, promising all sorts of obedience, but I do not like to trust him. He'd be certain to scream for assistance as soon as any of his people put in an appearance."

"As well trust a hungry dog with a sausage," returned the old ex-smuggler. "My own fear is that we shall not be able to hold him long or take him away with us, unless we receive assistance."

Mark was about to reply, when a door at one side of the apartment squeaked slightly on its hinges, calling attention in that direction, and a terrible-looking figure bounded into the center of the apartment—a half-clad, long-haired unshaven and wild-eyed man, who had an immense knife in one hand and a revolver in the other.

For a few moments both Mark and Runnel expected, as the new-comer glared from one to the other, to become the victims of an immediate and murderous assault.

"Some crank just out of an asylum," thought Mark, fixing the intruder with a desperate eye and running a nimble hand toward his hip pocket.

"Are—are you minions of this pretended Russian?" queried the stranger, in shrill, angry tones.

"Not a minion," answered Mark, smilingly.

"Then who and what are you?"

"I am a detective in the service of official and private gentlemen in Baltimore," answered Mark, "and this man is my assistant."

"Then you are hostile to Riloff?"

And the dark and angry mien of the stranger began to ameliorate.

"So much his enemies that we're just now in possession of these premises."

"Ha! how can you prove a statement so improbable, so overpowering?"

"Simply by showing you that we have overpowered Riloff, and that he is just now about as harmless as a last year's bird's-nest."

"In heaven's name, let me have some proof of this miracle," cried the stranger, his manner changing from menace to entreaty.

"With pleasure, sir. This way!"

Leading the way to the library, Mark pointed out to the stranger the figure of Riloff, who sat in his great arm-chair, gagged and bound.

"Sure enough!" cried the unknown, joyfully.

"The fiendish miscreant! For three months he has kept me on bread and water in a dungeon damper than a lobster-pot and darker than ground black cats—"

"Three months!" interrupted Mark, as he scrutinized the stranger more closely. "'Tis a significant period in this neighborhood! I begin to have a suspicion as to your identity! Is it not possible that you were once known among men, especially in Baltimore, as Colonel Broadwell, Chief of Police?"

"Bravo! I see that I am among friends who know something of my history," cried Colonel Broadwell, for the new-comer was indeed that long-missing gentleman. "The motive of Riloff in shutting me up can be briefly narrated. Upon my arrival here after the explosion which destroyed the Alaska, I recognized the pretended Riloff as a fugitive from justice. His name is really Abner Radwill, and he is still owing the State several years of hard labor!"

"I see! And, to save himself from exposure, he seized you and shut you up?" said Mark.

"He did. He literally buried me behind a wall eight or ten feet in thickness—so thick, in fact, that I have been all these months digging out. I intended to kill him at sight—"

"But that is now wholly unnecessary, colonel," said Ally. "As I happen to be master of ceremonies, here, *pro tem.*, you cannot do better than to resign yourself to my care. You shall have a good breakfast, a good bath and a change of clothing. I am even clever enough to cut your hair and trim your beard. In half an hour, your dreadful experience at the hands of this scoundrel will be a memory of the past."

"Bravo!" cried the colonel again, as he wrung the hand of the young detective with tears of joyous relief. "I resign myself to your care."

A reaction now setting in, he became momentarily as weak as a child.

But Mark and the old ex-smuggler came to his assistance, conducting him to the kitchen, and using all diligence to carry out the several measures Mark had announced.

The result was all that could be desired.

By the time the colonel had finished his breakfast, he was fairly in harmony with the portraits which had been widely published since his disappearance, except that he was much paler and thinner.

"And now what is to be our programme?" asked the colonel, as he lighted a cigar Mark had given him. "I want to telegraph my wife and family that I am safe, and also start for Baltimore by the first opportunity. Hello! what's this rumpus?" and the colonel gained his feet, advancing to one of the windows. "Bless me! here comes Commodore Fielding and a lot of his boys in blue. Glorious!"

Mark and Runnel hastened to look out.

What they saw was indeed "glorious"—a surprise that paid them for all the trouble and danger by which they had been harassed.

The commodore named—one of the most popular officers of the navy—was in the act of leading the way into the house at the head of a score of his men, all with their sabers and pistols, and in another moment he found himself face to face with Broadwell and his new acquaintances.

"What! Colonel Broadwell!" cried the commodore, as he sprung forward, with a cry of joyful surprise, and shook hands with him.

"Not dead, after all! Not even missing!"

"No, commodore, although I have been very near both situations," avowed Broadwell. "Permit me."

He presented Mark and Runnel to the commodore, mentioning briefly the circumstances under which they were present.

"Then Riloff is already in our hands," commented the commodore, with jubilant voice and mien. "So much the better. I'll just dispatch my men to the Grotto to seize everybody and everything there, and then give you further explanations."

A few words sufficed to the trusty lieutenant in charge of the men, and they were immediately hurried away toward the secret entrance of the cavern.

"I ought to have been here last evening," resumed the commodore, as he came back to Mark, "but we had to proceed with some caution. We have taken two large torpedoes out of each creek during the night, and the wonder is that you have not been blown to pieces by them long ago. Riloff had evidently planted

them to make short work of all intruders and give him a timely hint of our presence."

"But how came you here, commodore?" demanded Broadwell wonderingly.

"I'll soon tell you. This young fellow and his comrade have been sending almost hourly reports to Mr. Weatherbee during the last few days, and in due course Mr. Weatherbee has communicated them to me."

"You know all, then?"

"Nearly," and the commodore smiled contentedly. "But the best point remains to be told. By the time my men have captured all the scoundrels in the Crystal Grotto, Mr. Weatherbee himself will be among us—"

He was interrupted by an explosion which seemed to shake the earth.

All ran out into the open air.

"Heavens! the villains have blown up the Grotto, either by accident or design!" cried the commodore.

Such proved to be the case.

The great central cavern had been transformed into a chaotic mess of rock and water, and hardly a member of the torpedo gang had survived the terrible catastrophe.

"I hope my men were not caught," exclaimed the commodore. "I must look after them!"

He had scarcely gone when Mark, looking seaward, uttered a joyful exclamation.

"Yonder comes Captain Drake and the Water Witch, Runnel," he cried. "We shall now be able to get away to Foreland Manor."

He stepped toward the creek to meet Drake, who soon appeared, with a countenance of the most gloomy description.

"Come aboard as promptly as you can, Mark," was his greeting. "Olga has been carried off by Becker and Madder, who propose to take her to the Creswell mansion. Where's Ally?"

Mark briefly explained.

"Then all we have to do is to rendezvous at the Creswell mansion," said Drake. "Pass the word to such of your friends as remain behind, and bring the rest of them with you. Above all, don't forget to bring Riloff!"

"And don't refuse me a passage with him," demanded Broadwell, as he smilingly took part in the conversation. "I don't propose to lose sight of that man until he is safely landed in prison!"

Taking a temporary leave of the commodore, who found that none of his men had been seriously injured, Drake and Mark and the rest, with Riloff in their midst, set out for the shore. Ere they could reach it, however, their attention was attracted to a beautiful steam yacht which had just emerged from the cover of the adjacent bluffs, and was drawing near rapidly.

"Good! there is Mr. Weatherbee!" cried Mark, as his gaze encountered a commanding figure upon the deck of the yacht. "Our trip to the Creswell mansion will not be a long one, that's certain!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

IGNORANT of these stirring and fateful events, Henner continued his sail up the York River, getting as much speed as was possible out of his boat, and keeping a wary eye upon everything around him.

He was especially watchful of Olga, for the reason that he could not quite understand her strange silence and calmness.

He would have felt far more sure of his ground if she had cried and pleaded, and reproached him in a manner more in harmony with his conception of the feminine character.

"About how long is this voyage to last?" at length asked the captive.

"Not much longer," Henner deigned to answer. "We're in sight of the house already."

"Indeed! Where is it?"

"It's the only one just now in view," replied the miscreant, "and it's a beauty for my purpose."

Olga looked around keenly, but it was not till the second or third glance that she made out the little old house standing in the midst of dense trees upon a low point which was still at considerable distance.

"There's no one on the place, or near it," observed Henner, continuing to look toward it with a mien expressive of contentment.

"How do you know that?"

"I was there yesterday, and I was there a week ago."

"You've been looking up the matter, it seems?"

"Yes, getting ready for business! I've long had an idea, you see, that you'd fall into my hands at an early day, and I didn't wish to lose my bird for want of a cage!"

"I'm afraid your 'cage' will soon be of a different sort, Mr. Henner," said Olga, as coolly as scornfully. "There's a pretty severe law in force against any man who ventures to do what you are doing!"

"I don't care for the law," returned Henner. "To begin with, no one has seen you in my hands, and no one ever will. There's no one stirring on yonder shore, is there? There's not a single boat visible, except those sea-going crafts in the bay. Don't delude yourself with

the idea that I shall be caught, Miss Olga. I'd burn you up in the old house if I found myself in danger of arrest, or I'd sink you in one of the deepest holes in the river!"

"Perhaps you know where they are?"

"Yes, I do! I sounded yesterday on purpose!"

The captive shuddered at his cool and coarse brutality, but he did not weaken in the least. As plainly as he had exhibited his dastardly nature, she had ceased to be seriously afraid of him. Her intention to bide her time had strengthened, and she felt certain that an opportunity for action would offer.

She earnestly scanned the unknown shore, as she neared it, hoping to see a human being upon it; but none appeared to her gaze.

"Here we are," at last said Henner, as he arrived within a couple of rods of a smooth, pebbly beach. "You see the water is not deep, and I must ask you to wade ashore. I shall anchor where I am, so as to keep the boat in readiness to scoot at the first hint of trouble."

"You are very kind," replied Olga; "but I don't care to get wet!"

"Get out, I say, or I will throw you in!"

"Oh, you will? Well, I'll teach you now and here, Mr. Henner, that you are not going to have everything your own way!"

Before he could move or place himself upon his guard, she hurled herself violently against him, and threw him overboard.

Of course she had to go with him, but she knew he would release her and strike out for the shore as soon as he found himself in the water—a calculation in which she was not in the least mistaken.

Another instant, and she was trudging quietly through the water to the beach, while Henner, cursing and threatening her, came floundering after her.

Reaching the beach, she wrung the water from her skirts as well as she could and took her way toward the deserted house, a path to which was visible, although it was much overgrown with bushes from the want of use.

Her intention was, if she found a stout door, to take her stand behind it, and keep her enemy out.

As she neared the main entrance, however, she saw that the place was little better than a ruin, and that no part of it could be utilized as a bulwark against her abductor.

She accordingly darted past the entrance, and, seizing her wet skirts in her hands, at each side, made a resolute dash for the road, which she knew could not be far distant.

And even as she did so, she heard the rumbling of wheels upon the drive leading from the road to the mansion!

What music was that rumbling!

It told her that aid was at hand.

"Stop, curse you!" cried Henner, pursuing her with all the speed of which he was capable. "Stop, or I fire!"

The threat only seemed to quicken the movements of the fair fugitive.

Another instant, and the girl's gaze fell upon the vehicle whose rumbling had caught her hearing.

It was not only near, but it was advancing at a furious pace.

"Save me! save me!" she cried.

There came a response that Olga at first thought was a horrible hallucination.

Surely that voice was Ally's!

As she looked more keenly, the dazed look cleared from her face, giving place to a wild gleam of joy.

The new-comer was indeed Ally.

The lady who was in the act of seizing the reins, as he leaped to the ground, was Mrs. Weatherbee.

A single glance at the mien of the deliverer was enough for Henner.

He turned to fly, lending all his energies to the task.

But his wet garments handicapped him.

In less time than it takes to record the fact, he was overtaken, thrown to the ground, and bound hand and foot.

"My darling! my daughter!" came from the lady, as she stopped the carriage and sprang to the ground. "At last your mother has found you! My own! my own!"

We need not attempt to relate how Olga's soul responded to that greeting.

In an instant she was clinging to her mother in a close, glad embrace, the couple mingling their sobs and cries of gladness.

"And this is not all!" cried Ally, radiant with delight, as he pointed past the house to the river.

"Yonder comes Mr. Weatherbee, and Mark, and all our friends! Victory at last, Olga! A victory which is to endure forever!"

Is there need to follow further that glorious morning's gladness?

At Foreland Manor dwells to-day one of the happiest young couples we have ever known, and never are they more in love with the world than when Mr. and Mrs. Weatherbee are their guests. Mark is often there with his old-time comrade, and so is Captain Drake, with Colonel Broadwell, and the others who had assisted the young detectives in their great fight with the

torpedo-men. Mrs. Gussett acquits herself with perfect grace and devotion of the duties devolving upon her as housekeeper. As to Riloff, he is serving out the balance of his days in the dungeon he so richly deserves.

THE END.

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